A Dozen Russian Short Stories

(Including One Ukrainian)

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THE SERPENT'S STORY
Project Gutenberg's The Crushed Flower and Other Stories, by Leonid Andreyev

Hush! Hush! Hush! Come closer to me. Look into my eyes!

I always was a fascinating creature, tender, sensitive, and grateful. I was wise and I was noble. And I am so flexible in the writhing of my graceful body that it will afford you joy to watch my easy dance. Now I shall coil up into a ring, flash my scales dimly, wind myself around tenderly and clasp my steel body in my gentle, cold embraces. One in many! One in many!

Hush! Hush! Look into my eyes!

You do not like my writhing and my straight, open look? Oh, my head is heavy--therefore I sway about so quietly. Oh, my head is heavy--therefore I look so straight ahead, as I sway about. Come closer to me. Give me a little warmth; stroke my wise forehead with your fingers; in its fine outlines you will find the form of a cup into which flows wisdom, the dew of the evening-flowers. When I draw the air by my writhing, a trace is left in it--the design of the finest of webs, the web of dream-charms, the enchantment of noiseless movements, the

inaudible hiss of gliding lines. I am silent and I sway myself. I look ahead and I sway myself. What strange burden am I carrying on my neck?

I love you.

I always was a fascinating creature, and loved tenderly those I loved. Come closer to me. Do you see my white, sharp, enchanting little teeth? Kissing, I used to bite. Not painfully, no--just a trifle. Caressing tenderly, I used to bite a little, until the first bright little drops appeared, until a cry came forth which sounded like the laugh produced by tickling. That was very pleasant--think not it was unpleasant; otherwise they whom I kissed would not come back for more kisses. It is now that I can kiss only once--how sad--only once! One kiss for each--how little for a loving heart, for a sensitive soul, striving for a great union! But it is only I, the sad one, who kiss but once, and must seek love again--he knows no other love any more: to him my one, tender, nuptial kiss is inviolable and eternal. I am speaking to you frankly; and when my story is ended--I will kiss you.

I love you.

Look into my eyes. Is it not true that mine is a magnificent, a powerful look? A firm look and a straight look? And it is steadfast, like steel forced against your heart. I look ahead and sway myself, I look and I enchant; in my green eyes I gather your fear, your loving, fatigued, submissive longing. Come closer to me. Now I am a queen and you dare not fail to see my beauty; but there was a strange time--Ah, what a strange time! Ah, what a strange time! At the mere recollection I am agitated--Ah, what a strange time! No one loved me. No one respected me. I was persecuted with cruel ferocity, trampled in the mud and jeered--Ah, what a strange time it was! One in many! One in many!

I say to you: Come closer to me.

Why did they not love me? At that time I was also a fascinating creature, but without malice; I was gentle and I danced wonderfully. But they tortured me. They burnt me with fire. Heavy and coarse beasts trampled upon me with the dull steps of terribly heavy feet; cold tusks of bloody mouths tore my tender body--and in my powerless sorrow I bit the sand, I swallowed the dust of the ground--I was dying of despair. Crushed, I was dying every day. Every day I was dying of despair. Oh, what a terrible time that was! The stupid forest has forgotten everything--it does not remember that time, but you have pity on me. Come closer to me. Have pity on me, on the offended, on the sad one, on

the loving one, on the one who dances so beautifully.

I love you.

How could I defend myself? I had only my white, wonderful, sharp little teeth--they were good only for kisses. How could I defend myself? It is only now that I carry on my neck this terrible burden of a head, and my look is commanding and straight, but then my head was light and my eyes gazed meekly. Then I had no poison yet. Oh, my head is so heavy and it is hard for me to hold it up! Oh, I have grown tired of my look--two stones are in my forehead, and these are my eyes. Perhaps the glittering stones are precious--but it is hard to carry them instead of gentle eyes--they oppress my brain. It is so hard for my head! I look ahead and sway myself; I see you in a green mist--you are so far away. Come closer to me.

You see, even in sorrow I am beautiful, and my look is languid because of my love. Look into my pupil; I will narrow and widen it, and give it a peculiar glitter--the twinkling of a star at night, the playfulness of all precious stones--of diamonds, of green emeralds, of yellowish topaz, of blood-red rubies. Look into my eyes: It is I, the queen--I am crowning myself, and that which is glittering, burning and glowing--that robs you of your reason, your freedom and your life--it is poison. It is a drop of my poison.

How has it happened? I do not know. I did not bear ill-will to the living.

I lived and suffered. I was silent. I languished. I hid myself hurriedly when I could hide myself; I crawled away hastily. But they have never seen me weep--I cannot weep; and my easy dance grew ever faster and ever more beautiful. Alone in the stillness, alone in the thicket, I danced with sorrow in my heart--they despised my swift dance and would have been glad to kill me as I danced. Suddenly my head began to grow heavy--How strange it is!--My head grew heavy. Just as small and beautiful, just as wise and beautiful, it had suddenly grown terribly heavy; it bent my neck to the ground, and caused me pain. Now I am somewhat used to it, but at first it was dreadfully awkward and painful. I thought I was sick.

And suddenly... Come closer to me. Look into my eyes. Hush! Hush! Hush!

And suddenly my look became heavy--it became fixed and strange--I was even frightened! I want to glance and turn away--but cannot. I always

look straight ahead, I pierce with my eyes ever more deeply, I am as though petrified. Look into my eyes. It is as though I am petrified, as though everything I look upon is petrified. Look into my eyes.

I love you. Do not laugh at my frank story, or I shall be angry. Every hour I open my sensitive heart, for all my efforts are in vain--I am alone. My one and last kiss is full of ringing sorrow--and the one I love is not here, and I seek love again, and I tell my tale in vain--my heart cannot bare itself, and the poison torments me and my head grows heavier. Am I not beautiful in my despair? Come closer to me.

I love you.

Once I was bathing in a stagnant swamp in the forest--I love to be clean--it is a sign of noble birth, and I bathe frequently. While bathing, dancing in the water, I saw my reflection, and as always, fell in love with myself. I am so fond of the beautiful and the wise! And suddenly I saw--on my forehead, among my other inborn adornments, a new, strange sign--Was it not this sign that has brought the heaviness, the petrified look, and the sweet taste in my mouth? Here a cross is darkly outlined on my forehead--right here--look. Come closer to me. Is this not strange? But I did not understand it at that time, and I liked it. Let there be no more adornment. And on the same day, on that same terrible day, when the cross appeared, my first kiss became also my last--my kiss became fatal. One in many! One in many!

Oh!

You love precious stones, but think, my beloved, how far more precious is a little drop of my poison. It is such a little drop.--Have you ever seen it? Never, never. But you shall find it out. Consider, my beloved, how much suffering, painful humiliation, powerless rage devoured me: I had to experience in order to bring forth this little drop. I am a queen! I am a queen! In one drop, brought forth by myself, I carry death unto the living, and my kingdom is limitless, even as grief is limitless, even as death is limitless. I am queen! My look is inexorable. My dance is terrible! I am beautiful! One in many! One in many!

Oh!

Do not fall. My story is not yet ended. Come closer to me.

And then I crawled into the stupid forest, into my green dominion.

Now it is a new way, a terrible way! I was kind like a queen; and like a queen I bowed graciously to the right and to the left. And they--they ran away! Like a queen I bowed benevolently to the right and to the left--and they, queer people--they ran away. What do you think? Why did they run away? What do you think? Look into my eyes. Do you see in them a certain glimmer and a flash? The rays of my crown blind your eyes, you are petrified, you are lost. I shall soon dance my last dance---do not fall. I shall coil into rings, I shall flash my scales dimly, and I shall clasp my steel body in my gentle, cold embraces. Here I am! Accept my only kiss, my nuptial kiss--in it is the deadly grief of all oppressed lives. One in many! One in many!

Bend down to me. I love you.

Die!

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AN UPHEAVAL
Project Gutenberg's The Lady With The Dog and Other Stories, by Anton Chekhov

MASHENKA PAVLETSKY, a young girl who had only just finished her studies at a boarding school, returning from a walk to the house of the Kushkins, with whom she was living as a governess, found the household in a terrible turmoil. Mihailo, the porter who opened the door to her, was excited and red as a crab.

Loud voices were heard from upstairs.

"Madame Kushkin is in a fit, most likely, or else she has quarrelled with her husband," thought Mashenka.

In the hall and in the corridor she met maid-servants. One of them was crying. Then Mashenka saw, running out of her room, the master of the house himself, Nikolay Sergeitch, a little man with a flabby face and a bald head, though he was not old. He was red in the face and twitching all over. He passed the governess without noticing her, and throwing up his arms, exclaimed:

"Oh, how horrible it is! How tactless! How stupid! How barbarous! Abominable!"

Mashenka went into her room, and then, for the first time in her life, it was her lot to experience in all its acuteness the feeling that is so familiar to persons in dependent positions, who eat the bread of the rich and powerful, and cannot speak their minds. There was a search going on in her room. The lady of the house, Fedosya Vassilyevna, a stout, broad-shouldered, uncouth woman with thick black eyebrows, a faintly perceptible moustache, and red hands, who was exactly like a plain, illiterate cook in face and manners, was standing, without her cap on, at the table, putting back into Mashenka's workbag balls of wool, scraps of materials, and bits of paper.... Evidently the governess's arrival took her by surprise, since, on looking round and seeing the girl's pale and astonished face, she was a little taken aback, and muttered:

"_Pardon_. I ... I upset it accidentally.... My sleeve caught in it ..."

And saying something more, Madame Kushkin rustled her long skirts and went out. Mashenka looked round her room with wondering eyes, and, unable to understand it, not knowing what to think, shrugged her shoulders, and turned cold with dismay. What had Fedosya Vassilyevna been looking for in her work-bag? If she really had, as she said, caught her sleeve in it and upset everything, why had Nikolay Sergeitch dashed out of her room so excited and red in the face? Why was one drawer of the table pulled out a little way? The money-box, in which the governess put away ten kopeck pieces and old stamps, was open. They had opened it, but did not know how to shut it, though they had scratched the lock all over. The whatnot with her books on it, the things on the table, the bed--all bore fresh traces of a search. Her linen-basket, too. The linen had been carefully folded, but it was not in the same order as Mashenka had left it when she went out. So the search had been thorough, most thorough. But what was it for? Why? What had happened? Mashenka remembered the excited porter, the general turmoil which was still going on, the weeping servant-girl; had it not all some connection with the search that had just been made in her room? Was not she mixed up in something dreadful? Mashenka turned pale, and feeling cold all over, sank on to her linen-basket.

A maid-servant came into the room.

"Liza, you don't know why they have been rummaging in my room?" the governess asked her.

"Mistress has lost a brooch worth two thousand," said Liza.

"Yes, but why have they been rummaging in my room?"

"They've been searching every one, miss. They've searched all my things, too. They stripped us all naked and searched us.... God knows, miss, I never went near her toilet-table, let alone touching the brooch. I shall say the same at the police-station."

"But ... why have they been rummaging here?" the governess still wondered.

"A brooch has been stolen, I tell you. The mistress has been rummaging in everything with her own hands. She even searched Mihailo, the porter, herself. It's a perfect disgrace! Nikolay Sergeitch simply looks on and cackles like a hen. But you've no need to tremble like that, miss. They found nothing here. You've nothing to be afraid of if you didn't take the brooch."

"But, Liza, it's vile ... it's insulting," said Mashenka, breathless with indignation. "It's so mean, so low! What right had she to suspect me and to rummage in my things?"

"You are living with strangers, miss," sighed Liza. "Though you are a young lady, still you are ... as it were ... a servant.... It's not like living with your papa and mamma."

Mashenka threw herself on the bed and sobbed bitterly. Never in her life had she been subjected to such an outrage, never had she been so deeply insulted.... She, well-educated, refined, the daughter of a teacher, was suspected of theft; she had been searched like a street-walker! She could not imagine a greater insult. And to this feeling of resentment was added an oppressive dread of what would come next. All sorts of absurd ideas came into her mind. If they could suspect her of theft, then they might arrest her, strip her naked, and search her, then lead her through the street with an escort of soldiers, cast her into a cold, dark cell with mice and woodlice, exactly like the dungeon in which Princess Tarakanov was imprisoned. Who would stand up for her? Her parents lived far away in the provinces; they had not the money to come to her. In the capital she was as solitary as in a desert, without friends or kindred. They could do what they liked with her.

"I will go to all the courts and all the lawyers," Mashenka thought, trembling. "I will explain to them, I will take an oath.... They will believe that I could not be a thief!"

Mashenka remembered that under the sheets in her basket she had some sweetmeats, which, following the habits of her schooldays, she had put in her pocket at dinner and carried off to her room. She felt hot all over, and was ashamed at the thought that her little secret was known to the lady of the house; and all this terror, shame, resentment, brought on an attack of palpitation of the heart, which set up a throbbing in her temples, in her heart, and deep down in her stomach.

"Dinner is ready," the servant summoned Mashenka.

"Shall I go, or not?"

Mashenka brushed her hair, wiped her face with a wet towel, and went into the dining-room. There they had already begun dinner. At one end of the table sat Fedosya Vassilyevna with a stupid, solemn, serious face; at the other end Nikolay Sergeitch. At the sides there were the visitors and the children. The dishes were handed by two footmen in swallowtails and white gloves. Every one knew that there was an upset in the house, that Madame Kushkin was in trouble, and every one was silent. Nothing was heard but the sound of munching and the rattle of spoons on the plates.

The lady of the house, herself, was the first to speak.

"What is the third course?" she asked the footman in a weary, injured voice.

"_Esturgeon à la russe_," answered the footman.

"I ordered that, Fenya," Nikolay Sergeitch hastened to observe. "I wanted some fish. If you don't like it, _ma chère_, don't let them serve it. I just ordered it...."

Fedosya Vassilyevna did not like dishes that she had not ordered herself, and now her eyes filled with tears.

"Come, don't let us agitate ourselves," Mamikov, her household doctor, observed in a honeyed voice, just touching her arm, with a smile as honeyed. "We are nervous enough as it is. Let us forget the brooch! Health is worth more than two thousand roubles!"

"It's not the two thousand I regret," answered the lady, and a big tear rolled down her cheek. "It's the fact itself that revolts me! I cannot

put up with thieves in my house. I don't regret it--I regret nothing; but to steal from me is such ingratitude! That's how they repay me for my kindness...."

They all looked into their plates, but Mashenka fancied after the lady's words that every one was looking at her. A lump rose in her throat; she began crying and put her handkerchief to her lips.

"_Pardon_," she muttered. "I can't help it. My head aches. I'll go away."

And she got up from the table, scraping her chair awkwardly, and went out quickly, still more overcome with confusion.

"It's beyond everything!" said Nikolay Sergeitch, frowning. "What need was there to search her room? How out of place it was!"

"I don't say she took the brooch," said Fedosya Vassilyevna, "but can you answer for her? To tell the truth, I haven't much confidence in these learned paupers."

"It really was unsuitable, Fenya.... Excuse me, Fenya, but you've no kind of legal right to make a search."

"I know nothing about your laws. All I know is that I've lost my brooch. And I will find the brooch!" She brought her fork down on the plate with a clatter, and her eyes flashed angrily. "And you eat your dinner, and don't interfere in what doesn't concern you!"

Nikolay Sergeitch dropped his eyes mildly and sighed. Meanwhile Mashenka, reaching her room, flung herself on her bed. She felt now neither alarm nor shame, but she felt an intense longing to go and slap the cheeks of this hard, arrogant, dull-witted, prosperous woman.

Lying on her bed she breathed into her pillow and dreamed of how nice it would be to go and buy the most expensive brooch and fling it into the face of this bullying woman. If only it were God's will that Fedosya Vassilyevna should come to ruin and wander about begging, and should taste all the horrors of poverty and dependence, and that Mashenka, whom she had insulted, might give her alms! Oh, if only she could come in for a big fortune, could buy a carriage, and could drive noisily past the windows so as to be envied by that woman!

But all these were only dreams, in reality there was only one thing left

to do--to get away as quickly as possible, not to stay another hour in this place. It was true it was terrible to lose her place, to go back to her parents, who had nothing; but what could she do? Mashenka could not bear the sight of the lady of the house nor of her little room; she felt stifled and wretched here. She was so disgusted with Fedosya Vassilyevna, who was so obsessed by her illnesses and her supposed aristocratic rank, that everything in the world seemed to have become coarse and unattractive because this woman was living in it. Mashenka jumped up from the bed and began packing.

"May I come in?" asked Nikolay Sergeitch at the door; he had come up noiselessly to the door, and spoke in a soft, subdued voice. "May I?"

"Come in."

He came in and stood still near the door. His eyes looked dim and his red little nose was shiny. After dinner he used to drink beer, and the fact was perceptible in his walk, in his feeble, flabby hands.

"What's this?" he asked, pointing to the basket.

"I am packing. Forgive me, Nikolay Sergeitch, but I cannot remain in your house. I feel deeply insulted by this search!"

"I understand.... Only you are wrong to go. Why should you? They've searched your things, but you ... what does it matter to you? You will be none the worse for it."

Mashenka was silent and went on packing. Nikolay Sergeitch pinched his moustache, as though wondering what he should say next, and went on in an ingratiating voice:

"I understand, of course, but you must make allowances. You know my wife is nervous, headstrong; you mustn't judge her too harshly."

Mashenka did not speak.

"If you are so offended," Nikolay Sergeitch went on, "well, if you like, I'm ready to apologise. I ask your pardon."

Mashenka made no answer, but only bent lower over her box. This exhausted, irresolute man was of absolutely no significance in the household. He stood in the pitiful position of a dependent and hanger-on, even with the servants, and his apology meant nothing either.

"H'm!... You say nothing! That's not enough for you. In that case, I will apologise for my wife. In my wife's name.... She behaved tactlessly, I admit it as a gentleman...."

Nikolay Sergeitch walked about the room, heaved a sigh, and went on:

"Then you want me to have it rankling here, under my heart.... You want my conscience to torment me...."

"I know it's not your fault, Nikolay Sergeitch," said Mashenka, looking him full in the face with her big tear-stained eyes. "Why should you worry yourself?"

"Of course, no.... But still, don't you ... go away. I entreat you."

Mashenka shook her head. Nikolay Sergeitch stopped at the window and drummed on the pane with his finger-tips.

"Such misunderstandings are simply torture to me," he said. "Why, do you want me to go down on my knees to you, or what? Your pride is wounded, and here you've been crying and packing up to go; but I have pride, too, and you do not spare it! Or do you want me to tell you what I would not tell as Confession? Do you? Listen; you want me to tell you what I won't tell the priest on my deathbed?"

Mashenka made no answer.

"I took my wife's brooch," Nikolay Sergeitch said quickly. "Is that enough now? Are you satisfied? Yes, I ... took it.... But, of course, I count on your discretion.... For God's sake, not a word, not half a hint to any one!"

Mashenka, amazed and frightened, went on packing; she snatched her things, crumpled them up, and thrust them anyhow into the box and the basket. Now, after this candid avowal on the part of Nikolay Sergeitch, she could not remain another minute, and could not understand how she could have gone on living in the house before.

"And it's nothing to wonder at," Nikolay Sergeitch went on after a pause. "It's an everyday story! I need money, and she ... won't give it to me. It was my father's money that bought this house and everything, you know! It's all mine, and the brooch belonged to my mother, and ... it's all mine! And she took it, took possession of everything.... I

can't go to law with her, you'll admit.... I beg you most earnestly, overlook it ... stay on. _Tout comprendre, tout pardonner._ Will you stay?"

"No!" said Mashenka resolutely, beginning to tremble. "Let me alone, I entreat you!"

"Well, God bless you!" sighed Nikolay Sergeitch, sitting down on the stool near the box. "I must own I like people who still can feel resentment, contempt, and so on. I could sit here forever and look at your indignant face.... So you won't stay, then? I understand.... It's bound to be so ... Yes, of course.... It's all right for you, but for me--wo-o-o-o!... I can't stir a step out of this cellar. I'd go off to one of our estates, but in every one of them there are some of my wife's rascals ... stewards, experts, damn them all! They mortgage and remortgage.... You mustn't catch fish, must keep off the grass, mustn't break the trees."

"Nikolay Sergeitch!" his wife's voice called from the drawing-room. "Agnia, call your master!"

"Then you won't stay?" asked Nikolay Sergeitch, getting up quickly and going towards the door. "You might as well stay, really. In the evenings I could come and have a talk with you. Eh? Stay! If you go, there won't be a human face left in the house. It's awful!"

Nikolay Sergeitch's pale, exhausted face besought her, but Mashenka shook her head, and with a wave of his hand he went out.

Half an hour later she was on her way.

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FOR HERSELF OR FOR ANOTHER
The Project Gutenberg EBook of The republic of the southern cross and other stories, by Valery Brussof

I

“It is she! No, it can’t be, but yet of course it is!” said Peter Andreyevitch Basmanof to himself, as a lady who had previously attracted his attention passed for the fifth or sixth time the little table at which he was sitting.

He no longer doubted that it was Elizavieta. Certainly, they had not met for nearly twelve years, and no woman's face could remain unchanged during such a period. The features, formerly thin and sharply defined, had become somewhat fuller; the glance, once confiding as a child's, was now cold and stern, and in the whole face there was an expression of self-confidence which used not to be there. But were they not the same eyes which Basmanof had loved to liken to St. Elma's fires, was it not that same oval which by its purity of outline alone had often calmed his passion, were they not the same tiny ears which he had found so sweet to kiss? Yes, it must be Elizavieta: there could not be two women so much alike--as much alike as the reflections in two adjoining mirrors!

Basmanof's mind went quickly over the history of his love for Elizavieta. Not for the first time did he thus survey it, for of all his memories none was dearer or more sacred than this love. The young advocate, just stepping forth into life, had met a woman somewhat older than himself who had loved him with all the blindness of a fierce, unreasoning, ecstatical passion. Elizavieta's whole soul had been absorbed by this love, and nothing else in the world had mattered to her except this one thing--to possess her beloved, give herself to him, worship him. She had been prepared to sacrifice all the conventions of their "set," she had begged Basmanof to allow her to leave her husband and go to live with him; and in society not only had she not been ashamed of her connection with him--which, of course, had been talked about--but she had, as it were, gloried in it. Basmanof had never since come across a love so self-forgetful, so ready to sacrifice itself, and he could not have doubted that if at any time he had demanded of Elizavieta that she should kill herself she would have fulfilled his behest with a calm submissive rapture.

How had Basmanof profited by such a love, which comes to us only once in life? He had been afraid of it, afraid of its immensity and its strength. He had understood that where infinite sacrifices are made they are necessarily accompanied by great demands. He had been afraid to accept this love because it would have been necessary to give something in exchange for it, and he felt himself spiritually lacking. And he had been afraid that his just-blossoming career might be checked.... Basmanof, like a thief, had stolen half a year's love, which could not have been his had he been frank and shown his real character from the first, and then he had taken advantage of the first trifling excuse to "break off the connection."

Ah, how ashamed he was now to recall their last meeting before this took place. Elizavieta, blinded by her love for him, could not understand,

could not see, that her beloved was too low for her to abase herself before him, and she had begged him on her knees not to forsake her. He remembered how she, sobbing, had embraced his feet and let herself be dragged along the floor, how in despair she had beaten her head against the wall. He had learnt afterwards that his desertion had sent Elizavieta nearly out of her mind, that at one time she had wished to enter a convent, and that later when she became a widow she had gone abroad. Since then he had lost all trace of her.

Was it possible that here at Interlaken he was meeting her now again, twelve years after their rupture, calm, stern, beautiful as ever, with her inexplicable fascination for him and her tormentingly-sweet reminders of the past? Basmanof, sitting at the little café table, watched the tall lady in the large Paris hat as she went by, and his whole being burned feverishly with images and sensations of the past, suffusing in a moment the memory of his mind and the memory of his body. It was she, it was she, Elizavieta, whom he had not allowed to love him as fully as she had wished, and whom he himself had not dared to love as fully as he might, as much as he had wished! It was she, his better self, restored again to him when his life had almost passed, she, alive still, the possibility incarnate of reviving that which had been, of completing and restoring it.

In spite of his self-possession Basmanof's head was in a whirl. He paid the waiter for his ice, got up from his seat, and walked out by the path along which the tall lady had passed.

II

When Basmanof overtook the tall lady he raised his hat deferentially and bowed to her. But the lady showed no sign of recognition.

"Is it possible you do not recognise me, Elizavieta Vasilievna?" asked Basmanof, speaking in Russian.

After some hesitation the lady answered in Russian, though with a slight accent.

"Pardon me, but you've probably made a mistake. I am not an acquaintance of yours."

"Elizavieta Vasilievna!" exclaimed Basmanof deeply hurt by such a reply. "Surely you must recognise me! I am Peter Andreyevitch Basmanof."

“It’s the first time I’ve heard that name,” said the lady, “and I don’t know you at all.”

For several seconds Basmanof gazed at the lady who thus spoke to him, asking himself whether he had not made a mistake. But there was such an undoubted likeness, he so definitely recognised her as Elizavieta, that blocking up the pathway to this lady in the large Paris hat, he repeated insistently--

“I recognise _you_, Elizavieta Vasilievna! I understand that _you_ may have reasons for concealing your true name. I understand that you may not wish to meet your former acquaintances. But you must know that it’s absolutely necessary for me to speak a few words to you. I have gone through too much since we separated. I must put myself right with you. I don’t want you to despise me.”

Basmanof hardly knew himself what he was saying. He wanted only one thing--that Elizavieta would acknowledge that it was she. He was afraid that she might go away and not come back, might vanish for evermore, and that this meeting might prove to be a dream.

The lady moved quietly to one side, and said in French:

“_Monsieur, laissez-moi passer, s’il vous plaît! Je ne vous connais pas._”

She showed no agitation whatever, and at Basmanof’s words the expression of her face did not change in the least. But all the same he could not let her go, but followed her.

“Elizavieta!” cried he. “Curse me if you will, call me the most worthless of men, tell me that you no longer wish to know me--I will take it all humbly, as I ought. But do not pretend that you do not recognise me; that I cannot endure. You dare not, ought not, to insult me so.”

“I assure you,” the lady interrupted in a more severe tone, “that you mistake me for someone else. You call me Elizavieta Vasilievna, but that is not my name. I am Ekaterina Vladimirovna Sadikova, and my maiden name was Armand. Surely that is sufficient evidence for you to allow me to continue my walk, as I wish to do?”

“But why, then,” cried Basmanof, making a last attempt, “why have you

borne with me so long? If I am an utter stranger to you why didn't you at once order me to be silent, or call a policeman? No one behaves as gently as you have done towards a scoundrel of the street!"

"I see quite clearly," answered the lady, "that you are not a street scoundrel, and that you would not allow yourself to take any liberties. You've simply made a mistake: my likeness to some lady of your acquaintance has led you into an error. That is no crime, and I've no occasion whatever to call the police. But now everything has been explained--good-bye!"

Basmanof could insist no longer. He stood aside, and the lady walked slowly past him. But the whole of the conversation, the tone of the lady's voice, her movements, everything about her--only accentuated his belief that this was--Elizavieta.

Disturbed and agitated, he went back to his room at the hotel. Beyond the green meadow, like some gigantic phantom, shone the eternal snow of the Yungfrau. It seemed near, but was immeasurably far. Was it not like to Elizavieta, who had seemed risen from the dead, but who had again retreated into the far unknown?

It was not difficult for Basmanof to discover the address of the lady whom he had met. After some hesitation he wrote her a letter, in which he said that he had no wish to argue about what was evident. He had clearly made a mistake in taking an unknown lady for an old acquaintance of his, but their short encounter had made a deep impression on him, and he begged permission to bow to her when they met, in memory of an accidental acquaintance. The letter was couched in extremely cautious and respectful terms. When on the following day Basmanof met the lady who called herself Mme. Sadikova she bowed to him first and herself began to speak to him. And so their acquaintance began.

III

Mme. Sadikova gave no signs of ever having previously known Basmanof. Quite the contrary; she treated him as someone whom she had never met before. They talked about unimportant matters, connected chiefly with life at the watering-place. Mme. Sadikova's conversation was interesting and clever, and she appeared to be very well read. But when Basmanof tried to pass to more intimate, more painful questions his companion lightly and deftly evaded them.

Everything convinced Basmanof that she was Elizavieta. He recognised her voice, her favourite turns of speech; recognised that intangible something which expresses the individuality of a person but which it is difficult to define in words. He could have sworn that he was not mistaken.

Certainly there were slight marks of difference, but could not these be explained by the interval of twelve years? It was natural that from Elizavieta's flaming passions the experiences of life should have forged a steely coldness. It was natural that living abroad for many years Elizavieta should have somewhat forgotten her native tongue and speak it with an accent. Finally it was natural that in her behaviour, in her gestures, in her laughter, there should appear new features which had not been there before....

All the same, Basmanof was sometimes seized by doubt, and then he began mentally to notice hundreds of tiny peculiarities which distinguished Ekaterina from Elizavieta. But he only needed to look once more into Mme. Sadikova's face, to hear her speak, and all his doubts would disperse like a mist. He felt in himself and his soul was aware that this was she whom he had once loved.

Of course he did all he could to unravel the mystery. He tried to confuse her by asking unexpected questions; she was always on her guard, and she easily escaped out of all his snares. He tried to question her acquaintances; no one knew anything about her. He even went so far as to intercept a letter addressed to her; it proved to be from Paris, and consisted only of impersonal French phrases.

One evening, when the two were together in a restaurant, Basmanof could endure the continuous strain no longer, and he suddenly exclaimed--

"Why do we keep up this tormenting game? You are Elizavieta--I am sure of it. You can't forget how you once loved me. And of course you can't forget how basely I cast you off. But now I bring you all my soul's repentance. I despise myself for my former conduct. This is what I propose: take me for the whole of my life if you can forgive me. But I say this to Elizavieta, I give myself to her, not to any other woman."

Mme. Sadikova listened in silence to this little speech, transgressing as it did the limits of Society small-talk, and answered calmly--

"Dear Peter Andreyevitch. If you are speaking to me I might answer you, perhaps, but as you warn me that you are speaking to Elizavieta there's

nothing for me to say."

In the greatest excitement Basmanof got up from his seat and asked her:

"Do you wish to insist that you are not Elizavieta? Well, say so once more to my face without blenching and I will go away, I will at once hide myself from your eyes, I will vanish out of your life. Then there will be no more reason for my living."

Mme. Sadikova smiled sweetly.

"Do you wish so much that I were Elizavieta?" asked she. "Very well, I will be Elizavieta."

IV

Then the second game began, a more cruel one perhaps than the first. Mme. Sadikova called herself Elizavieta and treated Basmanof as an old acquaintance. When he spoke of the past she pretended to remember the persons and events of which he spoke. When he, all trembling, reminded her of her love for him, she, laughing, agreed that she had loved him; but she hinted that in the course of time this love had died down, as every flame dies down.

In order to play her part conscientiously, Mme. Sadikova herself would sometimes speak of the happenings of the past, but she mixed up the dates, remembered the wrong names, imagined things which had never occurred. It was especially tormenting that when she spoke of her love for Basmanof she referred to it as to a light flirtation, the accidental amusement of a lady in society. This seemed to Basmanof an insult to sacred things, and almost with a wail he besought her to be silent.

But this was little. Imperceptibly, step by step, Mme. Sadikova poisoned all Basmanof's most holy recollections. By her hints she discrowned all the most beautiful facts of the past. She gave him to understand that much of what had appeared to him as evidence of her self-forgetful love had been only hypocrisy and make-believe.

"Elizavieta!" implored Basmanof once of her. "Is it possible for me to believe that your passionate vows, your sobs, your despair, when you threw yourself unconscious on the floor--that all this was feigned? The most talented dramatic actress could not act so well. You are defaming yourself."

Mme. Sadikova, answering to the name of Elizavieta, as she had been doing for some time, said with a smile--

“How can one distinguish where acting ends and sincerity begins? I wanted at that time to feel strongly and so I allowed myself to pretend to be despairing and out of my senses. If in your place had been not you but some other, I should have acted just the same. And yet at that very moment it would have cost me nothing to overcome myself and not sob at all. Aren’t we all like that in life--actors--we don’t so much live as act the part of living?”

“That’s not true,” exclaimed Basmanof. “You say this because you do not know how Elizavieta loved. She would never have spoken so. You are only playing her part. It’s evident you are not she--you are Ekaterina.”

Mme. Sadikova laughed, and then said in a different tone--

“Just as you like, Peter Andreyevitch. I only played the part to please you. If you wish it I will become myself again, Ekaterina Vladimirovna Sadikova.”

“How can I know where you are real?” hissed Basmanof through his teeth.

He began to feel that he was going out of his mind. Fiction and reality for him had become confused. For some minutes he doubted who he was himself.

In the meantime Mme. Sadikova got up and proposed a walk and she again began to speak to him as Elizavieta.

V

The days went by. The season at Interlaken came to an end.

Basmanof, obsessed by his connection with this mysterious acquaintance of his, began to forget everything else; forgot why he had come to Interlaken, forget all his business, answered no letters from home, lived a sort of senseless life. Like a maniac, he thought only of one thing: how to guess the secret of Elizavieta-Ekaterina.

Was he in love with this woman?--he could not have said. She drew him to herself as to an abyss, as to a horror, to a place of destruction.

Months and years might go by and he would be glad to go on with this duel of mind and ready wit, this struggle of two minds, one of which sought to preserve her secret and the other strove to tear it from her.

But suddenly, early in October, Mme. Sadikova left Interlaken. She went away, neither saying good-bye to Basmanof nor warning him of her departure. On the following day, however, he received a letter from her, posted from Berne.

“I will not deprive you of the satisfaction of guessing who I am,” wrote Mme. Sadikova. “I leave the solution of this problem to your sharp wit. But if you are tired of guessing, and would like to have the simplest solution, I will tell it you. Suppose that I was really a complete stranger to you. Learning from your own agitated accounts, how cruelly you had once treated a certain Elizavieta, I determined to avenge her. I think I have attained my object; my revenge has been accomplished: you will never forget these weeks of torture at Interlaken. And for whom I took this vengeance, for myself or for another, is it not all the same in the long run? Good-bye, you will never see me again. Elizavieta-Ekaterina.”

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GENTLE BREATHING
The Project Gutenberg EBook of The Gentleman from San Francisco, by Ivan Alekseyevich Bunin

In the cemetery above a fresh mound of earth stands a new cross of oak--strong, heavy, smooth, a pleasant thing to look at. It is April, but the days are grey. From a long way off one can see through the bare trees the tomb-stones in the cemetery--a spacious, real country or cathedral town cemetery; the cold wind goes whistling, whistling through the china wreath at the foot of the cross. In the cross itself is set a rather large bronze medallion, and in the medallion is a portrait of a smart and charming school-girl, with happy, astonishingly vivacious eyes.

It is Olga Meschersky.

As a little girl there was nothing to distinguish her in the noisy crowd of brown dresses which made its discordant and youthful hum in the corridors and class-rooms; all that one could say of her was that she

was just one of a number of pretty, rich, happy little girls, that she was clever, but playful, and very careless of the precepts of her class-teacher. Then she began to develop and to blossom, not by days, but by hours. At fourteen, with a slim waist and graceful legs, there was already well developed the outline of her breasts and all those contours of which the charm has never yet been expressed in human words; at fifteen she was said to be a beauty. How carefully some of her school friends did their hair, how clean they were, how careful and restrained in their movements! But she was afraid of nothing--neither of ink-stains on her fingers, nor of a flushed face, nor of dishevelled hair, nor of a bare knee after a rush and a tumble. Without a thought or an effort on her part, imperceptibly there came to her everything which so distinguished her from the rest of the school during her last two years--daintiness, smartness, quickness, the bright and intelligent gleam in her eyes. No one danced like Olga Meschersky, no one could run or skate like her, no one at dances had as many admirers as she had, and for some reason no one was so popular with the junior classes. Imperceptibly she grew up into a girl and imperceptibly her fame in the school became established, and already there were rumours that she is flighty, that she cannot live without admirers, that the schoolboy, Shensin, is madly in love with her, that she, too, perhaps loves him, but is so changeable in her treatment of him that he tried to commit suicide....

During her last winter, Olga Meschersky went quite crazy with happiness, so they said at school. It was a snowy, sunny, frosty winter; the sun would go down early behind the grove of tall fir-trees in the snowy school garden; but it was always fine and radiant weather, with a promise of frost and sun again to-morrow, a walk in Cathedral Street, skating in the town park, a pink sunset, music, and that perpetually moving crowd in which Olga Meschersky seemed to be the smartest, the most careless, and the happiest. And then, one day, when she was rushing like a whirlwind through the recreation room with the little girls chasing her and screaming for joy, she was unexpectedly called up to the headmistress. She stopped short, took one deep breath, with a quick movement, already a habit, arranged her hair, gave a pull to the corners of her apron to bring it up on her shoulders, and with shining eyes ran upstairs. The headmistress, small, youngish, but grey-haired, sat quietly with her knitting in her hands at the writing-table, under the portrait of the Tsar.

"Good morning, Miss Meschersky," she said in French, without lifting her eyes from her knitting. "I am sorry that this is not the first time that I have had to call you here to speak to you about your behaviour."

"I am attending, madam," answered Olga, coming up to the table, looking at her brightly and happily, but with an expressionless face, and curtsying so lightly and gracefully, as only she could.

"You will attend badly--unfortunately I have become convinced of that," said the headmistress, giving a pull at the thread so that the ball rolled away over the polished floor, and Olga watched it with curiosity. The headmistress raised her eyes: "I shall not repeat myself, I shall not say much," she said.

Olga very much liked the unusually clean and large study; on frosty days the air in it was so pleasant with the warmth from the shining Dutch fire-place, and the fresh lilies-of-the-valley on the writing-table. She glanced at the young Tsar, painted full-length in a splendid hall, at the smooth parting in the white, neatly waved hair of the headmistress; she waited in silence.

"You are no longer a little girl," said the headmistress meaningly, beginning to feel secretly irritated.

"Yes, madam," answered Olga simply, almost merrily.

"But neither are you a woman yet," said the headmistress, still more meaningly, and her pale face flushed a little. "To begin with, why do you do your hair like that? You do it like a woman."

"It is not my fault, madam, that I have nice hair," Olga replied, and gave a little touch with both hands to her beautifully dressed hair.

"Ah, is that it? You are not to blame!" said the headmistress. "You are not to blame for the way you do your hair; you are not to blame for those expensive combs; you are not to blame for ruining your parents with your twenty-rouble shoes. But, I repeat, you completely forget that you are still only a schoolgirl...."

And here Olga, without losing her simplicity and calm, suddenly interrupted her politely:

"Excuse me, madam, you are mistaken--I am a woman. And, do you know who is to blame for that? My father's friend and neighbour, your brother, Alexey Mikhailovitch Malyntin. It happened last summer in the country...."

* * * * *

And a month after this conversation, a Cossack officer, ungainly and of plebeian appearance, who had absolutely nothing in common with Olga Meschersky's circle, shot her on the platform of the railway station, in a large crowd of people who had just arrived by train. And the incredible confession of Olga Meschersky, which had stunned the headmistress, was completely confirmed; the officer told the coroner that Meschersky had led him on, had had a _liaison_ with him, had promised to marry him, and at the railway station on the day of the murder, while seeing him off to Novocherkask had suddenly told him that she had never thought of marrying him, that all the talk about marriage was only to make a fool of him, and she gave him her diary to read with the pages in it which told about Malyntin.

"I glanced through those pages," said the officer, "went out on to the platform where she was walking up and down, and waiting for me to finish reading it, and I shot her. The diary is in the pocket of my overcoat; look at the entry for July 10 of last year."

And this is what the coroner read:

"It is now nearly two o'clock in the morning. I fell sound asleep, but woke up again immediately.... I have become a woman to-day! Papa, mamma, and Tolya had all gone to town, and I was left alone. I cannot say how happy I was to be alone. In the morning I walked in the orchard, in the field, and I went into the woods, and it seemed to me that I was all by myself in the whole world, and I never had such pleasant thoughts before. I had lunch by myself; then I played for an hour, and the music made me feel that I should live for ever, and be happier than any one else had ever been. Then I fell asleep in papa's study, and at four o'clock Kate woke me, and said that Alexey Mikhailovitch had come. I was very glad to see him; it was so pleasant to receive him and entertain him. He came with his pair of Viatka horses, very beautiful, and they stood all the time at the front door, but he stayed because it was raining, and hoped that the roads would dry towards evening. He was very sorry not to find papa at home, was very animated and treated me very politely, and made many jokes about his having been long in love with me. Before tea we walked in the garden, and the weather was charming, the sun shining through the whole wet garden; but it grew quite cold, and he walked with me, arm in arm, and said that he was Faust with Margarete. He is fifty-six, but still very handsome, and always very well dressed--the only thing I didn't like was his coming in a sort of cape--he smells of English eau-de-Cologne, and his eyes are quite young,

black; his beard is long and elegantly parted down the middle, it is quite silvery. We had tea in the glass verandah, and suddenly I did not feel very well, and lay down on the sofa while he smoked; then he sat down near me, and began to say nice things, and then to take my hand and kiss it. I covered my face with a silk handkerchief, and several times he kissed me on the lips through the handkerchief.... I can't understand how it happened; I went mad; I never thought I was like that. Now I have only one way out.... I feel such a loathing for him that I cannot endure it...."

* * * * *

The town in these April days has become clean and dry, its stones have become white, and it is easy and pleasant to walk on them. Every Sunday, after mass, along Cathedral Street which leads out of the town, there walks a little woman in mourning, in black kid gloves, and with an ebony sunshade. She crosses the yard of the fire-station, crosses the dirty market-place by the road where there are many black smithies, and where the wind blows fresher from the fields; in the distance, between the monastery and the gaol, is the white slope of the sky and the grey of the spring fields; and then, when you have passed the muddy pools behind the monastery wall and turn to the left, you will see what looks like a large low garden, surrounded by a white wall, on the gates of which is written "The Assumption of Our Lady." The little woman makes rapid little signs of the cross, and always walks on the main path. When she gets to the bench opposite the oak cross she sits down, in the wind and the chilly spring, for an hour, two hours, until her feet in the light boots, and her hand in the narrow kid glove, grow quite cold. Listening to the birds of spring, singing sweetly even in the cold, listening to the whistling of the wind through the porcelain wreath, she sometimes thinks that she would give half her life if only that dead wreath might not be before her eyes. The thought that it is Olga Meschersky who has been buried in that clay plunges her into astonishment bordering upon stupidity: how can one associate the sixteen-year-old school-girl, who but two or three months ago was so full of life, charm, happiness, with that mound of earth and that oak cross. Is it possible that beneath it is the same girl whose eyes shine out immortally from this bronze medallion, and how can one connect this bright look with the horrible event which is associated now with Olga Meschersky? But in the depths of her soul the little woman is happy, as are all those who are in love or are generally devoted to some passionate dream.

The woman is Olga Meschersky's class-mistress, a girl over thirty, who has for long been living on some illusion and putting it in the place of

her actual life. At first the illusion was her brother, a poor lieutenant, in no way remarkable--her whole soul was bound up in him and in his future, which, for some reason, she imagined as splendid, and she lived in the curious expectation that, thanks to him, her fate would transport her into some fairyland. Then, when he was killed at Mukden, she persuaded herself that she, very happily, is not like others, that instead of beauty and womanliness she has intellect and higher interests, that she is a worker for the ideal. And now Olga Meschersky is the object of all her thoughts, of her admiration and joy. Every holiday she goes to her grave--she had formed the habit of going to the cemetery after the death of her brother--for hours she never takes her eyes off the oak cross; she recalls Olga Meschersky's pale face in the coffin amid the flowers, and remembers what she once overheard: once during the luncheon hour, while walking in the school garden, Olga Meschersky was quickly, quickly saying to her favourite friend, the tall plump Subbotin:

"I have been reading one of papa's books--he has a lot of funny old books--I read about the kind of beauty which woman ought to possess. There's such a lot written there, you see, I can't remember it all; well, of course, eyes black as boiling pitch--upon my word, that's what they say there, boiling pitch!--eye-brows black as night, and a tender flush in the complexion, a slim figure, hands longer than the ordinary--little feet, a fairly large breast, a regularly rounded leg, a knee the colour of the inside of a shell, high but sloping shoulders--a good deal of it I have nearly learnt by heart, it is all so true; but do you know what the chief thing is? Gentle breathing! And I have got it; you listen how I breathe; isn't it gentle?"

Now the gentle breathing has again vanished away into the world, into the cloudy day, into the cold spring wind....

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MEMOIRS OF A MADMAN
Project Gutenberg's The Mantle and Other Stories, by Nicholas Gogol

October 3rd.--A strange occurrence has taken place to-day. I got up fairly late, and when Mawra brought me my clean boots, I asked her how late it was. When I heard it had long struck ten, I dressed as quickly as possible.

To tell the truth, I would rather not have gone to the office at all to-day, for I know beforehand that our department-chief will look as sour as vinegar. For some time past he has been in the habit of saying to me, "Look here, my friend; there is something wrong with your head. You often rush about as though you were possessed. Then you make such confused abstracts of the documents that the devil himself cannot make them out; you write the title without any capital letters, and add neither the date nor the docket-number." The long-legged scoundrel! He is certainly envious of me, because I sit in the director's work-room, and mend His Excellency's pens. In a word, I should not have gone to the office if I had not hoped to meet the accountant, and perhaps squeeze a little advance out of this skinflint.

A terrible man, this accountant! As for his advancing one's salary once in a way--you might sooner expect the skies to fall. You may beg and beseech him, and be on the very verge of ruin--this grey devil won't budge an inch. At the same time, his own cook at home, as all the world knows, boxes his ears.

I really don't see what good one gets by serving in our department. There are no plums there. In the fiscal and judicial offices it is quite different. There some ungainly fellow sits in a corner and writes and writes; he has such a shabby coat and such an ugly mug that one would like to spit on both of them. But you should see what a splendid country-house he has rented. He would not condescend to accept a gilt porcelain cup as a present. "You can give that to your family doctor," he would say. Nothing less than a pair of chestnut horses, a fine carriage, or a beaver-fur coat worth three hundred roubles would be good enough for him. And yet he seems so mild and quiet, and asks so amiably, "Please lend me your penknife; I wish to mend my pen." Nevertheless, he knows how to scarify a petitioner till he has hardly a whole stitch left on his body.

In our office it must be admitted everything is done in a proper and gentlemanly way; there is more cleanness and elegance than one will ever find in Government offices. The tables are mahogany, and everyone is addressed as "sir." And truly, were it not for this official propriety, I should long ago have sent in my resignation.

I put on my old cloak, and took my umbrella, as a light rain was falling. No one was to be seen on the streets except some women, who had flung their skirts over their heads. Here and there one saw a cabman or a shopman with his umbrella up. Of the higher classes one only saw an official here and there. One I saw at the street-crossing, and thought

to myself, "Ah! my friend, you are not going to the office, but after that young lady who walks in front of you. You are just like the officers who run after every petticoat they see."

As I was thus following the train of my thoughts, I saw a carriage stop before a shop just as I was passing it. I recognised it at once; it was our director's carriage. "He has nothing to do in the shop," I said to myself; "it must be his daughter."

I pressed myself close against the wall. A lackey opened the carriage door, and, as I had expected, she fluttered like a bird out of it. How proudly she looked right and left; how she drew her eyebrows together, and shot lightnings from her eyes--good heavens! I am lost, hopelessly lost!

But why must she come out in such abominable weather? And yet they say women are so mad on their finery!

She did not recognise me. I had wrapped myself as closely as possible in my cloak. It was dirty and old-fashioned, and I would not have liked to have been seen by her wearing it. Now they wear cloaks with long collars, but mine has only a short double collar, and the cloth is of inferior quality.

Her little dog could not get into the shop, and remained outside. I know this dog; its name is "Meggy."

Before I had been standing there a minute, I heard a voice call, "Good day, Meggy!"

Who the deuce was that? I looked round and saw two ladies hurrying by under an umbrella--one old, the other fairly young. They had already passed me when I heard the same voice say again, "For shame, Meggy!"

What was that? I saw Meggy sniffing at a dog which ran behind the ladies. The deuce! I thought to myself, "I am not drunk? That happens pretty seldom."

"No, Fidel, you are wrong," I heard Meggy say quite distinctly. "I was--bow--wow!--I was--bow! wow! wow!--very ill."

What an extraordinary dog! I was, to tell the truth, quite amazed to hear it talk human language. But when I considered the matter well, I ceased to be astonished. In fact, such things have already happened in

the world. It is said that in England a fish put its head out of water and said a word or two in such an extraordinary language that learned men have been puzzling over them for three years, and have not succeeded in interpreting them yet. I also read in the paper of two cows who entered a shop and asked for a pound of tea.

Meanwhile what Meggy went on to say seemed to me still more remarkable. She added, "I wrote to you lately, Fidel; perhaps Polkan did not bring you the letter."

Now I am willing to forfeit a whole month's salary if I ever heard of dogs writing before. This has certainly astonished me. For some little time past I hear and see things which no other man has heard and seen.

"I will," I thought, "follow that dog in order to get to the bottom of the matter. Accordingly, I opened my umbrella and went after the two ladies. They went down Bean Street, turned through Citizen Street and Carpenter Street, and finally halted on the Cuckoo Bridge before a large house. I know this house; it is Sverkoff's. What a monster he is! What sort of people live there! How many cooks, how many bagmen! There are brother officials of mine also there packed on each other like herrings. And I have a friend there, a fine player on the cornet."

The ladies mounted to the fifth story. "Very good," thought I; "I will make a note of the number, in order to follow up the matter at the first opportunity."

* * * * *

October 4th.--To-day is Wednesday, and I was as usual in the office. I came early on purpose, sat down, and mended all the pens.

Our director must be a very clever man. The whole room is full of bookcases. I read the titles of some of the books; they were very learned, beyond the comprehension of people of my class, and all in French and German. I look at his face; see! how much dignity there is in his eyes. I never hear a single superfluous word from his mouth, except that when he hands over the documents, he asks "What sort of weather is it?"

No, he is not a man of our class; he is a real statesman. I have already noticed that I am a special favourite of his. If now his daughter also--ah! what folly--let me say no more about it!

I have read the _Northern Bee_. What foolish people the French are! By heavens! I should like to tackle them all, and give them a thrashing. I have also read a fine description of a ball given by a landowner of Kursk. The landowners of Kursk write a fine style.

Then I noticed that it was already half-past twelve, and the director had not yet left his bedroom. But about half-past one something happened which no pen can describe.

The door opened. I thought it was the director; I jumped up with my documents from the seat, and--then--she--herself--came into the room. Ye saints! how beautifully she was dressed. Her garments were whiter than a swan's plumage--oh how splendid! A sun, indeed, a real sun!

She greeted me and asked, "Has not my father come yet?"

Ah! what a voice. A canary bird! A real canary bird!

"Your Excellency," I wanted to exclaim, "don't have me executed, but if it must be done, then kill me rather with your own angelic hand." But, God knows why, I could not bring it out, so I only said, "No, he has not come yet."

She glanced at me, looked at the books, and let her handkerchief fall. Instantly I started up, but slipped on the infernal polished floor, and nearly broke my nose. Still I succeeded in picking up the handkerchief. Ye heavenly choirs, what a handkerchief! So tender and soft, of the finest cambric. It had the scent of a general's rank!

She thanked me, and smiled so amiably that her sugar lips nearly melted. Then she left the room.

After I had sat there about an hour, a flunkey came in and said, "You can go home, Mr Ivanovitch; the director has already gone out!"

I cannot stand these lackeys! They hang about the vestibules, and scarcely vouchsafe to greet one with a nod. Yes, sometimes it is even worse; once one of these rascals offered me his snuff-box without even getting up from his chair. "Don't you know then, you country-bumpkin, that I am an official and of aristocratic birth?"

This time, however, I took my hat and overcoat quietly; these people naturally never think of helping one on with it. I went home, lay a good while on the bed, and wrote some verses in my note:

"'Tis an hour since I saw thee,
And it seems a whole long year;
If I loathe my own existence,
How can I live on, my dear?"

I think they are by Pushkin.

In the evening I wrapped myself in my cloak, hastened to the director's house, and waited there a long time to see if she would come out and get into the carriage. I only wanted to see her once, but she did not come.

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November 6th.--Our chief clerk has gone mad. When I came to the office to-day he called me to his room and began as follows: "Look here, my friend, what wild ideas have got into your head?"

"How! What? None at all," I answered.

"Consider well. You are already past forty; it is quite time to be reasonable. What do you imagine? Do you think I don't know all your tricks? Are you trying to pay court to the director's daughter? Look at yourself and realise what you are! A nonentity, nothing else. I would not give a kopeck for you. Look well in the glass. How can you have such thoughts with such a caricature of a face?"

May the devil take him! Because his own face has a certain resemblance to a medicine-bottle, because he has a curly bush of hair on his head, and sometimes combs it upwards, and sometimes plasters it down in all kinds of queer ways, he thinks that he can do everything. I know well, I know why he is angry with me. He is envious; perhaps he has noticed the tokens of favour which have been graciously shown me. But why should I bother about him? A councillor! What sort of important animal is that? He wears a gold chain with his watch, buys himself boots at thirty roubles a pair; may the deuce take him! Am I a tailor's son or some other obscure cabbage? I am a nobleman! I can also work my way up. I am just forty-two--an age when a man's real career generally begins. Wait a bit, my friend! I too may get to a superior's rank; or perhaps, if God is gracious, even to a higher one. I shall make a name which will far outstrip yours. You think there are no able men except yourself? I only need to order a fashionable coat and wear a tie like yours, and you would be quite eclipsed.

But I have no money--that is the worst part of it!

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November 8th.--I was at the theatre. "The Russian House-Fool" was performed. I laughed heartily. There was also a kind of musical comedy which contained amusing hits at barristers. The language was very broad; I wonder the censor passed it. In the comedy lines occur which accuse the merchants of cheating; their sons are said to lead immoral lives, and to behave very disrespectfully towards the nobility.

The critics also are criticised; they are said only to be able to find fault, so that authors have to beg the public for protection.

Our modern dramatists certainly write amusing things. I am very fond of the theatre. If I have only a kopeck in my pocket, I always go there. Most of my fellow-officials are uneducated boors, and never enter a theatre unless one throws free tickets at their head.

One actress sang divinely. I thought also of--but silence!

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November 9th.--About eight o'clock I went to the office. The chief clerk pretended not to notice my arrival. I for my part also behaved as though he were not in existence. I read through and collated documents. About four o'clock I left. I passed by the director's house, but no one was to be seen. After dinner I lay for a good while on the bed.

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November 11th.--To-day I sat in the director's room, mended twenty-three pens for him, and for Her--for Her Excellence, his daughter, four more.

The director likes to see many pens lying on his table. What a head he must have! He continually wraps himself in silence, but I don't think the smallest trifle escapes his eye. I should like to know what he is generally thinking of, what is really going on in this brain; I should like to get acquainted with the whole manner of life of these gentlemen, and get a closer view of their cunning courtiers' arts, and all the activities of these circles. I have often thought of asking His Excellence about them; but--the deuce knows why!--every time my tongue failed me and I could get nothing out but my meteorological report.

I wish I could get a look into the spare-room whose door I so often see open. And a second small room behind the spare-room excites my curiosity. How splendidly it is fitted up; what a quantity of mirrors and choice china it contains! I should also like to cast a glance into those regions where Her Excellency, the daughter, wields the sceptre. I should like to see how all the scent-bottles and boxes are arranged in her boudoir, and the flowers which exhale so delicious a scent that one is half afraid to breathe. And her clothes lying about which are too ethereal to be called clothes--but silence!

To-day there came to me what seemed a heavenly inspiration. I remembered the conversation between the two dogs which I had overheard on the Nevski Prospect. "Very good," I thought; "now I see my way clear. I must get hold of the correspondence which these two silly dogs have carried on with each other. In it I shall probably find many things explained."

I had already once called Meggy to me and said to her, "Listen, Meggy! Now we are alone together; if you like, I will also shut the door so that no one can see us. Tell me now all that you know about your mistress. I swear to you that I will tell no one."

But the cunning dog drew in its tail, ruffled up its hair, and went quite quietly out of the door, as though it had heard nothing.

I had long been of the opinion that dogs are much cleverer than men. I also believed that they could talk, and that only a certain obstinacy kept them from doing so. They are especially watchful animals, and nothing escapes their observation. Now, cost what it may, I will go to-morrow to Sverkoff's house in order to ask after Fidel, and if I have luck, to get hold of all the letters which Meggy has written to her.

* * * * *

November 12th.--To-day about two o'clock in the afternoon I started in order, by some means or other, to see Fidel and question her.

I cannot stand this smell of Sauerkraut which assails one's olfactory nerves from all the shops in Citizen Street. There also exhales such an odour from under each house door, that one must hold one's nose and pass by quickly. There ascends also so much smoke and soot from the artisans' shops that it is almost impossible to get through it.

When I had climbed up to the sixth story, and had rung the bell, a

rather pretty girl with a freckled face came out. I recognised her as the companion of the old lady. She blushed a little and asked "What do you want?"

"I want to have a little conversation with your dog."

She was a simple-minded girl, as I saw at once. The dog came running and barking loudly. I wanted to take hold of it, but the abominable beast nearly caught hold of my nose with its teeth. But in a corner of the room I saw its sleeping-basket. Ah! that was what I wanted. I went to it, rummaged in the straw, and to my great satisfaction drew out a little packet of small pieces of paper. When the hideous little dog saw this, it first bit me in the calf of the leg, and then, as soon as it had become aware of my theft, it began to whimper and to fawn on me; but I said, "No, you little beast; good-bye!" and hastened away.

I believe the girl thought me mad; at any rate she was thoroughly alarmed.

When I reached my room I wished to get to work at once, and read through the letters by daylight, since I do not see well by candle-light; but the wretched Mawra had got the idea of sweeping the floor. These blockheads of Finnish women are always clean where there is no need to be.

I then went for a little walk and began to think over what had happened. Now at last I could get to the bottom of all facts, ideas and motives! These letters would explain everything. Dogs are clever fellows; they know all about politics, and I will certainly find in the letters all I want, especially the character of the director and all his relationships. And through these letters I will get information about her who--but silence!

Towards evening I came home and lay for a good while on the bed.

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November 13th.--Now let us see! The letter is fairly legible but the handwriting is somewhat doggish.

* * * * *

"Dear Fidel!--I cannot get accustomed to your ordinary name, as if they could not have found a better one for you! Fidel! How tasteless! How

ordinary! But this is not the time to discuss it. I am very glad that we thought of corresponding with each other."

(The letter is quite correctly written. The punctuation and spelling are perfectly right. Even our head clerk does not write so simply and clearly, though he declares he has been at the University. Let us go on.)

"I think that it is one of the most refined joys of this world to interchange thoughts, feelings, and impressions."

(H'm! This idea comes from some book which has been translated from German. I can't remember the title.)

"I speak from experience, although I have not gone farther into the world than just before our front door. Does not my life pass happily and comfortably? My mistress, whom her father calls Sophie, is quite in love with me."

(Ah! Ah!--but better be silent!)

"Her father also often strokes me. I drink tea and coffee with cream. Yes, my dear, I must confess to you that I find no satisfaction in those large, gnawed-at bones which Polkan devours in the kitchen. Only the bones of wild fowl are good, and that only when the marrow has not been sucked out of them. They taste very nice with a little sauce, but there should be no green stuff in it. But I know nothing worse than the habit of giving dogs balls of bread kneaded up. Someone sits at table, kneads a bread-ball with dirty fingers, calls you and sticks it in your mouth. Good manners forbid your refusing it, and you eat it--with disgust it is true, but you eat it."

(The deuce! What is this? What rubbish! As if she could find nothing more suitable to write about! I will see if there is anything more reasonable on the second page.)

"I am quite willing to inform you of everything that goes on here. I have already mentioned the most important person in the house, whom Sophie calls 'Papa.' He is a very strange man."

(Ah! Here we are at last! Yes, I knew it; they have a politician's penetrating eye for all things. Let us see what she says about "Papa.")

"... a strange man. Generally he is silent; he only speaks seldom, but

about a week ago he kept on repeating to himself, 'Shall I get it or not?' In one hand he took a sheet of paper; the other he stretched out as though to receive something, and repeated, 'Shall I get it or not?' Once he turned to me with the question, 'What do you think, Meggy?' I did not understand in the least what he meant, sniffed at his boots, and went away. A week later he came home with his face beaming. That morning he was visited by several officers in uniform who congratulated him. At the dinner-table he was in a better humour than I have ever seen him before."

(Ah! he is ambitious then! I must make a note of that.)

"Pardon, my dear, I hasten to conclude, etc., etc. To-morrow I will finish the letter."

* * * * *

"Now, good morning; here I am again at your service. To-day my mistress Sophie ..."

(Ah! we will see what she says about Sophie. Let us go on!)

"... was in an unusually excited state. She went to a ball, and I was glad that I could write to you in her absence. She likes going to balls, although she gets dreadfully irritated while dressing. I cannot understand, my dear, what is the pleasure in going to a ball. She comes home from the ball at six o'clock in the early morning, and to judge by her pale and emaciated face, she has had nothing to eat. I could, frankly speaking, not endure such an existence. If I could not get partridge with sauce, or the wing of a roast chicken, I don't know what I should do. Porridge with sauce is also tolerable, but I can get up no enthusiasm for carrots, turnips, and artichokes."

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The style is very unequal! One sees at once that it has not been written by a man. The beginning is quite intelligent, but at the end the canine nature breaks out. I will read another letter; it is rather long and there is no date.

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"Ah, my dear, how delightful is the arrival of spring! My heart beats as though it expected something. There is a perpetual ringing in my ears,

so that I often stand with my foot raised, for several minutes at a time, and listen towards the door. In confidence I will tell you that I have many admirers. I often sit on the window-sill and let them pass in review. Ah! if you knew what miscreations there are among them; one, a clumsy house-dog, with stupidity written on his face, walks the street with an important air and imagines that he is an extremely important person, and that the eyes of all the world are fastened on him. I don't pay him the least attention, and pretend not to see him at all.

"And what a hideous bulldog has taken up his post opposite my window! If he stood on his hind-legs, as the monster probably cannot, he would be taller by a head than my mistress's papa, who himself has a stately figure. This lout seems, moreover, to be very impudent. I growl at him, but he does not seem to mind that at all. If he at least would only wrinkle his forehead! Instead of that, he stretches out his tongue, droops his big ears, and stares in at the window--this rustic boor! But do you think, my dear, that my heart remains proof against all temptations? Alas no! If you had only seen that gentlemanly dog who crept through the fence of the neighbouring house. 'Treasure' is his name. Ah, my dear, what a delightful snout he has!"

(To the deuce with the stuff! What rubbish it is! How can one blacken paper with such absurdities. Give me a man. I want to see a man! I need some food to nourish and refresh my mind, and get this silliness instead. I will turn the page to see if there is anything better on the other side.)

"Sophie sat at the table and sewed something. I looked out of the window and amused myself by watching the passers-by. Suddenly a flunkey entered and announced a visitor--'Mr Teploff.'

"'Show him in!' said Sophie, and began to embrace me. 'Ah! Meggy, Meggy, do you know who that is? He is dark, and belongs to the Royal Household; and what eyes he has! Dark and brilliant as fire.'

"Sophie hastened into her room. A minute later a young gentleman with black whiskers entered. He went to the mirror, smoothed his hair, and looked round the room. I turned away and sat down in my place.

"Sophie entered and returned his bow in a friendly manner.

"I pretended to observe nothing, and continued to look out of the window. But I leant my head a little on one side to hear what they were talking about. Ah, my dear! what silly things they discussed--how a lady

executed the wrong figure in dancing; how a certain Boboff, with his expansive shirt-frill, had looked like a stork and nearly fallen down; how a certain Lidina imagined she had blue eyes when they were really green, etc.

"I do not know, my dear, what special charm she finds in her Mr Teploff, and why she is so delighted with him."

(It seems to me myself that there is something wrong here. It is impossible that this Teploff should bewitch her. We will see further.)

"If this gentleman of the Household pleases her, then she must also be pleased, according to my view, with that official who sits in her papa's writing-room. Ah, my dear, if you know what a figure he is! A regular tortoise!"

(What official does she mean?)

"He has an extraordinary name. He always sits there and mends the pens. His hair looks like a truss of hay. Her papa always employs him instead of a servant."

(I believe this abominable little beast is referring to me. But what has my hair got to do with hay?)

"Sophie can never keep from laughing when she sees him."

* * * * *

You lie, cursed dog! What a scandalous tongue! As if I did not know that it is envy which prompts you, and that here there is treachery at work--yes, the treachery of the chief clerk. This man hates me implacably; he has plotted against me, he is always seeking to injure me. I'll look through one more letter; perhaps it will make the matter clearer.

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"Fidel, my dear, pardon me that I have not written for so long. I was floating in a dream of delight. In truth, some author remarks, 'Love is a second life.' Besides, great changes are going on in the house. The young chamberlain is always here. Sophie is wildly in love with him. Her papa is quite contented. I heard from Gregor, who sweeps the floor, and is in the habit of talking to himself, that the marriage will soon be

celebrated. Her papa will at any rate get his daughter married to a general, a colonel, or a chamberlain."

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Deuce take it! I can read no more. It is all about chamberlains and generals. I should like myself to be a general--not in order to sue for her hand and all that--no, not at all; I should like to be a general merely in order to see people wriggling, squirming, and hatching plots before me.

And then I should like to tell them that they are both of them not worth spitting on. But it is vexatious! I tear the foolish dog's letters up in a thousand pieces.

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December 3rd.--It is not possible that the marriage should take place; it is only idle gossip. What does it signify if he is a chamberlain! That is only a dignity, not a substantial thing which one can see or handle. His chamberlain's office will not procure him a third eye in his forehead. Neither is his nose made of gold; it is just like mine or anyone else's nose. He does not eat and cough, but smells and sneezes with it. I should like to get to the bottom of the mystery--whence do all these distinctions come? Why am I only a titular councillor?

Perhaps I am really a count or a general, and only appear to be a titular councillor. Perhaps I don't even know who and what I am. How many cases there are in history of a simple gentleman, or even a burgher or peasant, suddenly turning out to be a great lord or baron? Well, suppose that I appear suddenly in a general's uniform, on the right shoulder an epaulette, on the left an epaulette, and a blue sash across my breast, what sort of a tune would my beloved sing then? What would her papa, our director, say? Oh, he is ambitious! He is a freemason, certainly a freemason; however much he may conceal it, I have found it out. When he gives anyone his hand, he only reaches out two fingers. Well, could not I this minute be nominated a general or a superintendent? I should like to know why I am a titular councillor--why just that, and nothing more?

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December 5th.--To-day I have been reading papers the whole morning. Very strange things are happening in Spain. I have not understood them

all. It is said that the throne is vacant, the representatives of the people are in difficulties about finding an occupant, and riots are taking place.

All this appears to me very strange. How can the throne be vacant? It is said that it will be occupied by a woman. A woman cannot sit on a throne. That is impossible. Only a king can sit on a throne. They say that there is no king there, but that is not possible. There cannot be a kingdom without a king. There must be a king, but he is hidden away somewhere. Perhaps he is actually on the spot, and only some domestic complications, or fears of the neighbouring Powers, France and other countries, compel him to remain in concealment; there might also be other reasons.

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December 8th.--I was nearly going to the office, but various considerations kept me from doing so. I keep on thinking about these Spanish affairs. How is it possible that a woman should reign? It would not be allowed, especially by England. In the rest of Europe the political situation is also critical; the Emperor of Austria----

These events, to tell the truth, have so shaken and shattered me, that I could really do nothing all day. Mawra told me that I was very absent-minded at table. In fact, in my absent-mindedness I threw two plates on the ground so that they broke in pieces.

After dinner I felt weak, and did not feel up to making abstracts of reports. I lay most of the time on my bed, and thought of the Spanish affairs.

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The year 2000: April 43rd.--To-day is a day of splendid triumph. Spain has a king; he has been found, and I am he. I discovered it to-day; all of a sudden it came upon me like a flash of lightning.

I do not understand how I could imagine that I am a titular councillor. How could such a foolish idea enter my head? It was fortunate that it occurred to no one to shut me up in an asylum. Now it is all clear, and as plain as a pikestaff. Formerly--I don't know why--everything seemed veiled in a kind of mist. That is, I believe, because people think that the human brain is in the head. Nothing of the sort; it is carried by the wind from the Caspian Sea.

For the first time I told Mawra who I am. When she learned that the king of Spain stood before her, she struck her hands together over her head, and nearly died of alarm. The stupid thing had never seen the king of Spain before!

I comforted her, however, at once by assuring her that I was not angry with her for having hitherto cleaned my boots badly. Women are stupid things; one cannot interest them in lofty subjects. She was frightened because she thought all kings of Spain were like Philip II. But I explained to her that there was a great difference between me and him. I did not go to the office. Why the deuce should I? No, my dear friends, you won't get me there again! I am not going to worry myself with your infernal documents any more.

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Marchember 86. Between day and night.--To-day the office-messenger came and summoned me, as I had not been there for three weeks. I went just for the fun of the thing. The chief clerk thought I would bow humbly before him, and make excuses; but I looked at him quite indifferently, neither angrily nor mildly, and sat down quietly at my place as though I noticed no one. I looked at all this rabble of scribblers, and thought, "If you only knew who is sitting among you! Good heavens! what a to-do you would make. Even the chief clerk would bow himself to the earth before me as he does now before the director."

A pile of reports was laid before me, of which to make abstracts, but I did not touch them with one finger.

After a little time there was a commotion in the office, and there a report went round that the director was coming. Many of the clerks vied with each other to attract his notice; but I did not stir. As he came through our room, each one hastily buttoned up his coat; but I had no idea of doing anything of the sort. What is the director to me? Should I stand up before him? Never. What sort of a director is he? He is a bottle-stopper, and no director. A quite ordinary, simple bottle-stopper--nothing more. I felt quite amused as they gave me a document to sign.

They thought I would simply put down my name--"So-and-so, Clerk." Why not? But at the top of the sheet, where the director generally writes his name, I inscribed "Ferdinand VIII." in bold characters. You should have seen what a reverential silence ensued. But I made a gesture with

my hand, and said, "Gentlemen, no ceremony please!" Then I went out, and took my way straight to the director's house.

He was not at home. The flunkey wanted not to let me in, but I talked to him in such a way that he soon dropped his arms.

I went straight to Sophie's dressing-room. She sat before the mirror. When she saw me, she sprang up and took a step backwards; but I did not tell her that I was the king of Spain.

But I told her that a happiness awaited her, beyond her power to imagine; and that in spite of all our enemies' devices we should be united. That was all which I wished to say to her, and I went out. Oh, what cunning creatures these women are! Now I have found out what woman really is. Hitherto no one knew whom a woman really loves; I am the first to discover it--she loves the devil. Yes, joking apart, learned men write nonsense when they pronounce that she is this and that; she loves the devil--that is all. You see a woman looking through her lorgnette from a box in the front row. One thinks she is watching that stout gentleman who wears an order. Not a bit of it! She is watching the devil who stands behind his back. He has hidden himself there, and beckons to her with his finger. And she marries him--actually--she marries him!

That is all ambition, and the reason is that there is under the tongue a little blister in which there is a little worm of the size of a pin's head. And this is constructed by a barber in Bean Street; I don't remember his name at the moment, but so much is certain that, in conjunction with a midwife, he wants to spread Mohammedanism all over the world, and that in consequence of this a large number of people in France have already adopted the faith of Islam.

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No date. The day had no date.--I went for a walk incognito on the Nevski Prospect. I avoided every appearance of being the king of Spain. I felt it below my dignity to let myself be recognised by the whole world, since I must first present myself at court. And I was also restrained by the fact that I have at present no Spanish national costume. If I could only get a cloak! I tried to have a consultation with a tailor, but these people are real asses! Moreover, they neglect their business, dabble in speculation, and have become loafers. I will have a cloak made out of my new official uniform which I have only worn twice. But to prevent this botcher of a tailor spoiling it, I will make

it myself with closed doors, so that no one sees me. Since the cut must be altogether altered, I have used the scissors myself.

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I don't remember the date. The devil knows what month it was. The cloak is quite ready. Mawra exclaimed aloud when I put it on. I will, however, not present myself at court yet; the Spanish deputation has not yet arrived. It would not be befitting if I appeared without them. My appearance would be less imposing. From hour to hour I expect them.

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The 1st.--The extraordinary long delay of the deputies in coming astonishes me. What can possibly keep them? Perhaps France has a hand in the matter; it is certainly hostilely inclined. I went to the post office to inquire whether the Spanish deputation had come. The postmaster is an extraordinary blockhead who knows nothing. "No," he said to me, "there is no Spanish deputation here; but if you want to send them a letter, we will forward it at the fixed rate." The deuce! What do I want with a letter? Letters are nonsense. Letters are written by apothecaries....

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Madrid, February 30th.--So I am in Spain after all! It has happened so quickly that I could hardly take it in. The Spanish deputies came early this morning, and I got with them into the carriage. This unexpected promptness seemed to me strange. We drove so quickly that in half an hour we were at the Spanish frontier. Over all Europe now there are cast-iron roads, and the steamers go very fast. A wonderful country, this Spain!

As we entered the first room, I saw numerous persons with shorn heads. I guessed at once that they must be either grandees or soldiers, at least to judge by their shorn heads.

The Chancellor of the State, who led me by the hand, seemed to me to behave in a very strange way; he pushed me into a little room and said, "Stay here, and if you call yourself 'King Ferdinand' again, I will drive the wish to do so out of you."

I knew, however, that that was only a test, and I reasserted my conviction; on which the Chancellor gave me two such severe blows with a

stick on the back, that I could have cried out with the pain. But I restrained myself, remembering that this was a usual ceremony of old-time chivalry when one was inducted into a high position, and in Spain the laws of chivalry prevail up to the present day. When I was alone, I determined to study State affairs; I discovered that Spain and China are one and the same country, and it is only through ignorance that people regard them as separate kingdoms. I advise everyone urgently to write down the word "Spain" on a sheet of paper; he will see that it is quite the same as China.

But I feel much annoyed by an event which is about to take place to-morrow; at seven o'clock the earth is going to sit on the moon. This is foretold by the famous English chemist, Wellington. To tell the truth, I often felt uneasy when I thought of the excessive brittleness and fragility of the moon. The moon is generally repaired in Hamburg, and very imperfectly. It is done by a lame cooper, an obvious blockhead who has no idea how to do it. He took waxed thread and olive-oil--hence that pungent smell over all the earth which compels people to hold their noses. And this makes the moon so fragile that no men can live on it, but only noses. Therefore we cannot see our noses, because they are on the moon.

When I now pictured to myself how the earth, that massive body, would crush our noses to dust, if it sat on the moon, I became so uneasy, that I immediately put on my shoes and stockings and hastened into the council-hall to give the police orders to prevent the earth sitting on the moon.

The grandees with the shorn heads, whom I met in great numbers in the hall, were very intelligent people, and when I exclaimed, "Gentlemen! let us save the moon, for the earth is going to sit on it," they all set to work to fulfil my imperial wish, and many of them clambered up the wall in order to take the moon down. At that moment the Imperial Chancellor came in. As soon as he appeared, they all scattered, but I alone, as king, remained. To my astonishment, however, the Chancellor beat me with the stick and drove me to my room. So powerful are ancient customs in Spain!

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January in the same year, following after February.--I can never understand what kind of a country this Spain really is. The popular customs and rules of court etiquette are quite extraordinary. I do not understand them at all, at all. To-day my head was shorn, although I

exclaimed as loudly as I could, that I did not want to be a monk. What happened afterwards, when they began to let cold water trickle on my head, I do not know. I have never experienced such hellish torments. I nearly went mad, and they had difficulty in holding me. The significance of this strange custom is entirely hidden from me. It is a very foolish and unreasonable one.

Nor can I understand the stupidity of the kings who have not done away with it before now. Judging by all the circumstances, it seems to me as though I had fallen into the hands of the Inquisition, and as though the man whom I took to be the Chancellor was the Grand Inquisitor. But yet I cannot understand how the king could fall into the hands of the Inquisition. The affair may have been arranged by France--especially Polignac--he is a hound, that Polignac! He has sworn to compass my death, and now he is hunting me down. But I know, my friend, that you are only a tool of the English. They are clever fellows, and have a finger in every pie. All the world knows that France sneezes when England takes a pinch of snuff.

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The 25th.--To-day the Grand Inquisitor came into my room; when I heard his steps in the distance, I hid myself under a chair. When he did not see me, he began to call. At first he called "Poprishchin!" I made no answer. Then he called "Axanti Ivanovitch! Titular Councillor! Nobleman!" I still kept silence. "Ferdinand the Eighth, King of Spain!" I was on the point of putting out my head, but I thought, "No, brother, you shall not deceive me! You shall not pour water on my head again!"

But he had already seen me and drove me from under the chair with his stick. The cursed stick really hurts one. But the following discovery compensated me for all the pain, i.e. that every cock has his Spain under his feathers. The Grand Inquisitor went angrily away, and threatened me with some punishment or other. I felt only contempt for his powerless spite, for I know that he only works like a machine, like a tool of the English.

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34 March. February, 349.--No, I have no longer power to endure. O God! what are they going to do with me? They pour cold water on my head. They take no notice of me, and seem neither to see nor hear. Why do they torture me? What do they want from one so wretched as myself? What can I give them? I possess nothing. I cannot bear all their tortures; my head

aches as though everything were turning round in a circle. Save me! Carry me away! Give me three steeds swift as the wind! Mount your seat, coachman, ring bells, gallop horses, and carry me straight out of this world. Farther, ever farther, till nothing more is to be seen!

Ah! the heaven bends over me already; a star glimmers in the distance; the forest with its dark trees in the moonlight rushes past; a bluish mist floats under my feet; music sounds in the cloud; on the one side is the sea, on the other, Italy; beyond I also see Russian peasants' houses. Is not my parents' house there in the distance? Does not my mother sit by the window? O mother, mother, save your unhappy son! Let a tear fall on his aching head! See how they torture him! Press the poor orphan to your bosom! He has no rest in this world; they hunt him from place to place.

Mother, mother, have pity on your sick child! And do you know that the Bey of Algiers has a wart under his nose?

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THE MAN WITH A NATIONAL FACE
The Project Gutenberg EBook of Tales of Two Countries, by Maxim Gorky

Once upon a time there was a gentleman who had lived more than half his life, when he suddenly felt that something was lacking in him. He was very much alarmed.

He felt himself; everything seemed to be all right and in its place, his stomach was even protruding. He examined himself in a looking-glass, and saw that he had eyes, ears, and everything else that a serious man should have. He counted his fingers: there were ten right enough, and ten toes on his feet; but still he had an uncomfortable feeling that something was missing.

He was sadly puzzled.

He asked his wife:

"What do you think, Mitrodora? Is everything about me in order?"

She answered reassuringly:

"Everything."

"But sometimes it seems to me----"

She was a religious woman and advised him:

"Whenever you begin to imagine anything, recite mentally: 'Let God arise and his enemies will fall.'"

He questioned his friends also, in a roundabout way. They answered evasively, but looked at him suspiciously, as though he merited strong condemnation.

"What can it be?" thought the gentleman, feeling downcast.

He tried to recall his past. Everything seemed to be quite normal. He had been a socialist, had incited youths to revolt; but later on he had renounced everything, and for a long time now had strenuously trampled underfoot the "crops" himself had sown. Generally speaking he had lived like everybody else, in accordance with the spirit and inspirations of the times.

He pondered and pondered and suddenly discovered what it was:

"O Lord, I haven't got a national face!"

He rushed to the looking-glass and saw that his face really had an indistinct expression, like that of a blind man. It suggested a page of a translation from some foreign language, done carelessly by a more or less illiterate person who had omitted all punctuation, so that it was impossible to make out what was on the page. It might be read as containing either a demand that one's soul should be sacrificed for the liberty of the people, or that it was necessary to recognise the full sway of absolutism.

"H'm, what a mixture, to be sure," thought the gentleman; and he decided at once: "No, it is not the thing to live with a face like that."

So he began to wash it every day with expensive soaps, but this did not help: the skin shone, but the indistinctness remained. He began to lick his face with his tongue--his tongue was long and well adjusted, for at one time the gentleman had been engaged in journalism. But even his tongue was of no avail. He applied Japanese massage to his face,

and bumps appeared, as they do after a hard fight, but still he could obtain no definiteness of expression.

He tried and tried, but without success; all that he achieved was to lose a pound and a half in weight. Suddenly to his joy he learned that the head constable of his district, von Judenfresser, was known for his understanding of national problems. He went to him and said:

"Matters stand so-and-so, your Honour. Cannot you help me in my trouble?"

The head constable of course was flattered: here was an educated man, not long since suspected of disloyalty to the throne, now asking advice with confidence on how to change the expression of his face. The constable chuckled, and in his great joy exclaimed:

"There is nothing simpler, my dear friend, my American gem. Rub your face against members of a subject nationality. Your real face will at once be revealed."

The gentleman was pleased, the weight of a mountain fell from his shoulders. He sniggered loyally and said to himself in some astonishment:

"Why could I not have guessed it myself? The whole matter is so simple."

They parted very good friends. The gentleman rushed out into the street, planted himself at a comer and waited. Presently a Jew came along; he rushed up to him and began:

"If you," he said, "are a Jew, you must become a Russian. If you do not want to, then----"

The Jew (as is known from all anecdotes) belongs to a nervous and timid people. But this one was of a capricious character and would not put up with pogroms. He raised his arm, gave the gentleman a blow on the left cheek, and went home to his family.

The gentleman leaned against the wall, rubbing his face, and thinking:

"Well, well, the formation of one's national face is connected with sensations not always altogether agreeable, but let it be. Nekrassoff, although he was a poor poet, said quite truly:

"Nothing can be got for naught:
Fate demands its victims."

Suddenly a native of the Caucasus passed by. As proved by all anecdotes they are an uncivilised and hot-headed people. He was singing as he walked along:

"Mitskhales sakles mingrule."[1]

The gentleman pounced upon him:

"No," he said, "be quiet. If you are a Georgian you must become a Russian, and you must not love the hut of a Mingrelian, but what you are ordered to love. You must like prison, even without orders----"

The Georgian left the gentleman in a horizontal position and went and drank Kachetin wine. The gentleman lay on the ground and pondered:

"Well, well, there are also Tartars, Armenians, Bashkirs, Kirghises, Mordva, Lithuanians. O Lord, what a number! And these are not all. There are our own people, the Slavs."

At this juncture a Little Russian came along, and of course he was singing in a very disloyal manner:

"Our ancestors once led
A happy life in Ukraina...."

"No," said the gentleman, rising to his feet. "Will you be kind enough in future to use the letter 'y' instead of 'oo'[2]; otherwise you undermine the unity of the empire."

He argued the point at some length, and the Little Russian listened, for, as proved most conclusively by all the collections of Little Russian anecdotes, the Little Russians are a very slow people, and like to do their work without hurrying. Unfortunately this gentleman was somewhat insistent.

Some kind people picked the gentleman up and asked him:

"Where do you live?"

"In Great Russia."

Of course they took him to the police station. As they were driving along he felt his face, not without pride, though with a certain sense of pain. It seemed to him that it had grown considerably broader and he thought to himself:

"I believe I have acquired ..."

He was taken before von Judenfresser, and the latter, like the humane person he was, sent for the police doctor. When the doctor came they began to whisper to each other in surprise, and kept giggling, which seemed a strange thing to do in the circumstances.

"It is the first case in the whole of my practice," whispered the doctor. "I cannot make it out."

"What may that mean?" thought the gentleman, and asked:

"Well, how do I look?"

"The old face is quite rubbed off," answered von Judenfresser.

"And generally speaking has my face changed?"

"Of course it has, only, you know----"

The doctor said consolingly:

"Your face is such, dear sir, that you may just as well put your trousers on it."

So it remained for the rest of his life. There is no moral here.

[1] "Love a Mingrelian hut."--_Trans._

[2] The Little Russians speak a dialect of the language in which the Russian sound for "y" is pronounced "oo."

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ON THE VOLGA

The Project Gutenberg EBook of Birds of Heaven and Other Stories, by Vladimir Galaktionovich Korolenko

I

As he went out on the deck of the steamer which was running upstream, Dmitry Parfentyevich drew a deep breath.

The day was ending and the sun was hanging low above the forest-covered mountain. The river furnished a majestic and peaceful picture. Somewhere in the distance a steamboat whistled; a sailboat heavily laden lay on the river and seemed as immobile as the sleepy wife of a merchant. The rafts all carried fires,—the men were cooking their dinners. Two small barks, fastened together and heading obliquely across stream, floated by, hardly touching the glassy surface of the river, and beneath them, swinging and swaying, hung their reflection in the blue depths. When the wake of the steamer, spreading ever wider and wider, touched this image, it suddenly broke and scattered. It was a sudden shattering of a mirror and the fragments floated and sparkled for a long time.

“Are you all right, Grunya?” asked Dmitry Parfentyevich, sitting down beside his daughter.

“Yes,” she answered briefly.

The girl wore a dark dress. A Scythian kerchief on her forehead threw a shadow over her pale young face; her large eyes were dreamy and thoughtful.

“The main thing is heavenly blessing and quiet,” moralized Dmitry Parfentyevich.

His life was moving toward its close and he thought that nothing could be better than the quiet of a dying day....

Only quiet and prayer after sinful vanity and weakness.... May God grant no new wishes, but save from every new temptation.

“Grunya?” Dmitry Parfentyevich looked at his daughter and he wished to ask about her own thoughts.

“Yes,” answered the girl, but her gaze, dreamily running far ahead over the golden river and the mountains with their quiet veil of bluish mist, seemed to be seeking something else.

The passengers on the deck were just as quiet. Some were carrying on private conversations; others were getting ready for tea at the little tables.

In the stern sat a group of Tatars, returning home from Astrakhan. There was an old patriarch with three sons. A fourth, the favorite, had been buried in a strange city. Akhmetzyan had been taken ill with an unknown disease, lay a week and died.

“All is as Allah wills,” said the stern face of the old man, but he had still to tell the mother of the death of her beloved son.

Everything breathed of silence and peace and the mountains on the right bank swam up one after the other and then, receding into the distance, they seemed to wrap themselves in a blue haze.

II

Near Dmitry Parfentyevich were the knots of passengers, some on benches by the table, others on the deck and sitting on bundles.

There were several raftsmen from Unzha, a fat and good-natured country woman, and an old man, probably also a small farmer. The centre of the group at this moment was a steward for the third class passengers. He was still young and was dressed in a worn and dirty frock coat, with the number “2” on the left side. A napkin hung over his shoulder and with this he attained remarkable success in rubbing the wet tables and the glasses. He had just brought to the deck a tray of dishes with his arms wide open and with his eyes looking ahead and at his feet at the same instant. He had put the tray on the table, wiped off the dust around it with his napkin, and then joining this group of his countrymen sat down on the end of the bench and at once assumed a leading rôle in the conversation which they had already commenced.

“I’ll tell you,” he said in a wholly confident tone, “if I cross myself with my fist, it works. This way: in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen. It really works just the same. What do you think?”

He looked at the others with the air of a man who had just propounded a very clever riddle.

“The fist, you say?” asked one of the peasants from Unzha in surprise.

“Yes, the fist.”

The listeners shook their heads as a mark of doubt and reproof. The farmer turned sternly to the young fellow:

“N-now, stop that! You claim to be above God....”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, you are a foo-fool to make the sign of the cross with your fist. Impossible. It never works.”

“It does!”

The young fellow looked round upon his auditors with a joyously radiant face and was about to give the answer to the riddle when he heard at one of the tables the impatient tapping of a spoon on a glass.

The fellow jumped up as if he had been shot. In an instant he was at the other end of the deck, grabbed the tea-pots, ran to the machinery and back, set the table, shook himself, ran below again, put up the orders and passed them around the tables, and all the while the conversation continued before an enchanted audience.

“He’s beside himself!” said the farmer.

“Due to a stupid mind,” added the old woman pityingly.

“The little fellow was a liar, that’s all!”

“How can you do it with your fist?... That never works....”

The general opinion was evidently very definite.

“Impossible,” said several voices suddenly. “It’s impudence and nothing else....”

“What——?”

“Where did you get that notion?”

“It’s impudence....”

“Just you listen,” interrupted the young waiter, suddenly coming up the hatch, “and you may not think it impudent.... In the linen factory in the place where I lived there was a fellow and a machine caught all his fingers and slash bang! That’s all! He didn’t have a finger left! And his right hand too.... Just imagine: being a man with nothing but his palm left....”

The audience was charmed.

“What are you driving at?”

“You see the question.... What would you do, brothers?... Could he cross himself with his left hand?...”

“What, what?” The farmer waved his hand. “You can’t use the left hand.... That’s for Satan....”

“But he’d lost the fingers on the right, so he couldn’t join them.... Had only the palm left!...”

“That’s so....”

The riddle became more popular. The passengers nearby listened; those further off got up and walked nearer to the speaker. Even the young merchant who was talking very authoritatively about politics at the tea table with a fat gentleman, deigned to turn his benevolent attention to the all-ingrossing riddle. He tapped with his spoon and beckoned to the waiter.

“Waiter, how much?... O-oh! What did you say: with the fist?”

“Yes, your excellency, among ourselves.... It doesn’t interest you....”

“No, but it’s really clever, isn’t it?” remarked the merchant to his fat friend.

The latter’s answer was unintelligible, for the man was struggling with a slice of bread and butter.

But the Tatars sat in the stern without taking any part in the general conversation. They were silent, but once in a while they made brief remarks to one another in their own language.

III

Dmitry Parfentyevich started like a war horse at the sound of a trumpet. Grunya did not take her eyes from the distant mountains and the river, but it was easy to see that she was not looking at them. Without turning her head she was listening intently to the conversation of her neighbors.

Dmitry Parfentyevich looked at her askance. Hitherto she would have turned to him immediately with a trusting question: “Papa, how’s that?” Now she seemed to pay no attention to her father’s opinion.

He waited for her to ask but her large eyes fell with evident sympathy upon that knot of dark, ignorant people, who were shocked by such a meaningless change in their faith....

He rose and walked up to the disputants. His thickset, dry figure, savagely pure, in an old-fashioned costume, won for him the immediate attention of all.

“What’s the trouble?” he asked.

“It’s this way, you see, merchant.... This little fellow says you can cross yourself with your fist.”

“I heard him but don’t repeat it! That man’s a fool!”

“Yes, yes,” whispered one timidly, “we’re all dark people....”

“That’s true, ... you are. If you follow the teachings of your true masters, you’ll find nothing surprising here.”

The audience grew rapidly larger. All were now interested in the tall old man with quiet and majestically austere manners. Dmitry Parfentyevich was not embarrassed by the attention he was receiving. It was not the first time. There was only one person in that crowd that interested him and that was his scholar, his disobedient and devout Grunya. In his own way he loved his daughter and his rough heart was torn by her unwearied doubts and her sad look. He passionately wished her to feel that peace from heaven which his own heart had so fully obtained. But her disobedience always aroused in his stern soul a storm of suppressed rage and this struggled with his love and usually conquered it.

Grunya still kept her seat. She did not stir but she listened intently.

“Now listen,” came to her ears the confident and harsh voice of her father. “This is the true cross and it is to this cross that we hold in order to be saved.”

He raised his hand with two fingers raised, so that all could see.

“A dissenter,” was the murmur in the crowd. Two or three merchants who were apparently fond of religious discussions, pressed nearer, when they heard this unexpected confession.

“We are not dissenters,” continued Dmitry Parfentyevich. “We confess the true faith. This was the form of the cross which the holy fathers and the patriarchs believed in. This was taught by St. Theodoret.”

He raised his hand with the two fingers joined still higher.

“Press the thumb against the little finger and the ring finger. That is to signify the Holy Trinity. Three Persons united. Raise two fingers: that’s for deity and humanity—two natures. Theodoret teaches again that the middle finger is to be bent a little. That symbolizes humanity reverencing deity. See!”

“Wait!” interrupted one of the merchants who had forced his way to the front. “St. Cyril says something else.”

“St. Cyril says the same thing. Only he bids you keep both fingers straight.”

“That must make a difference.”

“Wait, my good man, that’s wrong.... Don’t interrupt....” The speakers stopped. “Let him finish.... What about the fist, merchant?”

“Yes ... that’s the main thing.”

“It’s like this: if he lost his fingers he wasn’t to blame. That means: God allowed it. It was His will! But a man can’t live without making the sign of the cross. Without the sign of the cross he’s worse than this heathen Tatar. He’s bound to cross himself ... with his right hand....”

“Well?”

“And his fingers,” concluded Dmitry Parfentyevich after a pause: “His

fingers he must place in thought, as he is ordered by the holy fathers and patriarchs....”

The crowd heaved a sigh of relief and joy.

“Merchant, we thank you!”

“He decided....”

“That’s it: he just chewed it up and explained it.”

“With thought! That’s true!”

“Of course!... With thought, nothing else!”

“That will work all right....”

Dmitry Parfentyevich looked at his daughter.... What did he care for this applause, these praises from strange, ignorant people! She, his daughter, kept looking straight ahead with a look of indifference upon her face, as if her father had said something which she had long known and which had lost all power to touch her confused and weary soul....

The old man frowned and his voice became menacing.

“If he joins his imaginary thumb with the two imaginary fingers beside it—he is wrong.... A man who crosses himself that way will be condemned to eternal damnation.... Cursed be he in this life and he will have no lot in the next.”

These violent and harsh words, suddenly falling upon the crowd which had just quieted down, changed its mood.

It became excited, began to murmur, separate into smaller groups. A black-eyed, black-haired merchant, who had maintained hitherto an obstinate silence, now struck his fist on the table and said with a flash of his deepset and enthusiastic eyes:

“True! The Devil Kuka and his whole crew are in that cursed cross with the thumb and the fingers next to it.”

“No, stop!” shouted the Orthodox, “don’t insult the true cross! Why do you separate the Three Persons, c-curses on you?... This is the Trinity in these three fingers....”

“Where are your first fingers?”

“Merchant, have you read the hundred and fifth article?”

“Yes, it’s on the end of the world.”

Dmitry Parfentyevich remained the centre of the group. He was still composed and calm, but each time when he answered any of his opponents, he transfixed him with a stubborn and unfriendly glance.

With splashing wheels, the steamboat steadily ascended the river and cleft the blue surface of the stream; it carried with it this group of violently quarreling people and the clay slopes of the steep bank reëchoed their confused voices.

A steep mountain, which had concealed a bend in the river, now receded to the rear and a broad sweep of the river appeared in front. The sun hung like a red ball above the water and from the east, darkness spread over the meadows as if on the soft wingbeats of the evening shadows, overtaking the boat and falling more and more noticeably over the Volga.

IV

The silent group of Tatars suddenly rose from their places in the stern and with even step moved to the paddle box at the edge of the upper deck. They took off their coats and spread them on the deck. Then they took off their slippers and reverently stepped upon their coats. The glow of the sunset fell upon the rough faces of the Tatars. Their thickset figures were sharply outlined against the light and cooling heavens.

“They’re praying,” one man whispered and several left the quarreling group and walked to the railing.

Others followed. The argument quieted down.

The Tatars stood with their eyes closed, their brows were raised and their thoughts were apparently lifted up to that place where the last rays of daylight were fading on the heights. At times they unlocked their arms which were crossed on their breasts and placed them on their knees, and then they bowed their heads with their sheepskin caps, low, so low. They arose again and stretched their hands with the fingers extended toward the light.

The lips of the Moslems were whispering the words of an unknown and unintelligible prayer....

“Look there,” said one peasant, and he stopped hesitatingly, without expressing his thought.

“They are fulfilling the rites of their religion,” asserted another.

“Yes, they’re praying too....”

The Tatars suddenly knelt, touched their foreheads to the deck, and at once rose again. The three young men took their coats and slippers and went back to their former seats on the stern. The old man was left alone. He sat with his feet crossed under him. His lips moved and over his beautiful face with its gray beard passed a strange and touching expression of deep sorrow softened by reverence before the will of the Most High. His hands quickly fingered his beads.

“See.... He has beads too.”

“A zealous man....”

“Yes, it’s for his son.... He died in Astrakhan,” explained the merchant who had gone down the river with the Tatars.

“Oh, oh, oh!” sighed one of them philosophically. “Every man wishes to be saved. No one wishes to perish, whoever he is, even if he’s a Tatar....”

It was too dark to tell who was speaking. The group melted together but the isolated figure of the old man still at his devotions could be seen at the edge of the paddle box above the water. He was silently swaying backwards and forwards.

“Papa!” suddenly came a soft voice.

It was Grunya calling her father.

“What is it, daughter?”

The girl was silent for a moment; she kept looking at that praying figure of the adherent of an alien faith, and then her young and eager voice clearly sounded through the quiet:

“Please, ... what do you think: will God hear that prayer?”

Grunya spoke softly, but all heard her. It seemed as if a light breeze had passed along the deck and in more than one soul the question of the pale girl found response: will God hear that prayer?

All were silent.... Their eyes involuntarily turned upward, as if they wished to follow in the blue of the evening sky the invisible flight of that strange and unintelligible but beautiful prayer....

“Why won’t He?...” came the irresolutely soft words of a good-natured peasant. “You see, he’s not praying to any one else. There’s only one God.”

“Yes, the Father. You see, he’s looking to heaven.”

“Who knows, who knows?...”

“It’s a hard question—the ways of the Lord....”

A block creaked at the bow, the light of a golden star flew to the top of the mast; the waves splashed somewhere in the darkness; the distant whistle of an almost invisible steamboat reëchoed above the sleeping river. In the sky the bright stars appeared one after the other, and the blue night hung noiselessly above the meadows, the mountains and the ravines of the Volga.

The earth seemed to be sadly asking some question but the heavens remained silent with its quiet and its mystery....

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THE OUTRAGE, A TRUE STORY
Project Gutenberg's The River of Life and Other Stories, by Alexander Kuprin

It was five o’clock on a July afternoon. The heat was terrible. The whole of the huge stone-built town breathed out heat like a glowing furnace. The glare of the white-walled house was insufferable. The asphalt pavements grew soft and burned the feet. The shadows of the acacias spread over the cobbled road, pitiful and weary. They too seemed hot. The sea, pale in the sunlight, lay heavy and immobile as one dead. Over the streets hung a white dust.

In the foyer of one of the private theatres a small committee of local barristers who had undertaken to conduct the cases of those who had suffered in the last pogrom against the Jews was reaching the end of its daily task. There were nineteen of them, all juniors, young, progressive and conscientious men. The sitting was without formality, and white ducks, flannels and white alpaca were in the majority. They sat anywhere, at little marble tables, and the chairman stood in front of an empty counter where chocolates were sold in the winter.

The barristers were quite exhausted by the heat which poured in through the windows, with the dazzling sunlight and the noise of the streets. The proceedings went lazily and with a certain irritation.

A tall young man with a fair moustache and thin hair was in the chair. He was dreaming voluptuously how he would be off in an instant on his new-bought bicycle to the bungalow. He would undress quickly, and without waiting to cool, still bathed in sweat, would fling himself into the clear, cold, sweet-smelling sea. His whole body was enervated and tense, thrilled by the thought. Impatiently moving the papers before him, he spoke in a drowsy voice.

‘So, Joseph Moritzovich will conduct the case of Rubinchik.... Perhaps there is still a statement to be made on the order of the day?’

His youngest colleague, a short, stout Karaim, very black and lively, said in a whisper so that every one could hear: ‘On the order of the day, the best thing would be iced _kvass_....’

The chairman gave him a stern side-glance, but could not restrain a smile. He sighed and put both his hands on the table to raise himself and declare the meeting closed, when the doorkeeper, who stood at the entrance to the theatre, suddenly moved forward and said: ‘There are seven people outside, sir. They want to come in.’

The chairman looked impatiently round the company.

‘What is to be done, gentlemen?’

Voices were heard.

‘Next time. _Basta!_’

‘Let ’em put it in writing.’

‘If they’ll get it over quickly.... Decide it at once.’

‘Let ’em go to the devil. Phew! It’s like boiling pitch.’

‘Let them in.’ The chairman gave a sign with his head, annoyed. ‘Then bring me a Vichy, please. But it must be cold.’

The porter opened the door and called down the corridor: ‘Come in. They say you may.’

Then seven of the most surprising and unexpected individuals filed into the foyer. First appeared a full-grown, confident man in a smart suit, of the colour of dry sea-sand, in a magnificent pink shirt with white stripes and a crimson rose in his buttonhole. From the front his head looked like an upright bean, from the side like a horizontal bean. His face was adorned with a strong, bushy, martial moustache. He wore dark blue pince-nez on his nose, on his hands straw-coloured gloves. In his left hand he held a black walking-stick with a silver mount, in his right a light blue handkerchief.

The other six produced a strange, chaotic, incongruous impression, exactly as though they had all hastily pooled not merely their clothes, but their hands, feet and heads as well. There was a man with the splendid profile of a Roman senator, dressed in rags and tatters. Another wore an elegant dress waistcoat, from the deep opening of which a dirty little-Russian shirt leapt to the eye. Here were the unbalanced faces of the criminal type, but looking with a confidence that nothing could shake. All these men, in spite of their apparent youth, evidently possessed a large experience of life, an easy manner, a bold approach, and some hidden, suspicious cunning.

The gentleman in the sandy suit bowed just his head, neatly and easily, and said with a half-question in his voice: ‘Mr. Chairman?’

‘Yes. I am the chairman,’ said the latter. ‘What is your business?’

‘We--all whom you see before you,’ the gentleman began in a quiet voice and turned round to indicate his companions, ‘we come as delegates from the United Rostov-Kharkov-and-Odessa-Nicolaiev Association of Thieves.’

The barristers began to shift in their seats.

The chairman flung himself back and opened his eyes wide. ‘Association

of _what_?' he said, perplexed.

'The Association of Thieves,' the gentleman in the sandy suit coolly repeated. 'As for myself, my comrades did me the signal honour of electing me as the spokesman of the deputation.'

'Very ... pleased,' the chairman said uncertainly.

'Thank you. All seven of us are ordinary thieves--naturally of different departments. The Association has authorised us to put before your esteemed Committee'--the gentleman again made an elegant bow--'our respectful demand for assistance.'

'I don't quite understand ... quite frankly ... what is the connection....' The chairman waved his hands helplessly. 'However, please go on.'

'The matter about which we have the courage and the honour to apply to you, gentlemen, is very clear, very simple, and very brief. It will take only six or seven minutes. I consider it my duty to warn you of this beforehand, in view of the late hour and the 115 degrees that Fahrenheit marks in the shade.' The orator expectorated slightly and glanced at his superb gold watch. 'You see, in the reports that have lately appeared in the local papers of the melancholy and terrible days of the last pogrom, there have very often been indications that among the instigators of the pogrom who were paid and organised by the police--the dregs of society, consisting of drunkards, tramps, souteneurs, and hooligans from the slums--thieves were also to be found. At first we were silent, but finally we considered ourselves under the necessity of protesting against such an unjust and serious accusation, before the face of the whole of intellectual society. I know well that in the eye of the law we are offenders and enemies of society. But imagine only for a moment, gentlemen, the situation of this enemy of society when he is accused wholesale of an offence which he not only never committed, but which he is ready to resist with the whole strength of his soul. It goes without saying that he will feel the outrage of such an injustice more keenly than a normal, average, fortunate citizen. Now, we declare that the accusation brought against us is utterly devoid of all basis, not merely of fact but even of logic. I intend to prove this in a few words if the honourable committee will kindly listen.'

'Proceed,' said the chairman.

‘Please do.... Please ...’ was heard from the barristers, now animated.

‘I offer you my sincere thanks in the name of all my comrades. Believe me, you will never repent your attention to the representatives of our ... well, let us say, slippery, but nevertheless difficult, profession. “So we begin,” as Giraldoni sings in the prologue to _Pagliacci_.

‘But first I would ask your permission, Mr. Chairman, to quench my thirst a little.... Porter, bring me a lemonade and a glass of English bitter, there’s a good fellow. Gentlemen, I will not speak of the moral aspect of our profession nor of its social importance. Doubtless you know better than I the striking and brilliant paradox of Proudhon: _La propriété c’est le vol_--a paradox if you like, but one that has never yet been refuted by the sermons of cowardly bourgeois or fat priests. For instance: a father accumulates a million by energetic and clever exploitation, and leaves to his son--a rickety, lazy, ignorant, degenerate idiot, a brainless maggot, a true parasite. Potentially a million roubles is a million working days, the absolutely irrational right to labour, sweat, life, and blood of a terrible number of men. Why? What is the ground or reason? Utterly unknown. Then why not agree with the proposition, gentlemen, that our profession is to some extent as it were a correction of the excessive accumulation of values in the hands of individuals, and serves as a protest against all the hardships, abominations, arbitrariness, violence, and negligence of the human personality, against all the monstrosities created by the bourgeois capitalistic organisation of modern society? Sooner or later, this order of things will assuredly be overturned by the social revolution. Property will pass away into the limbo of melancholy memories and with it, alas! we will disappear from the face of the earth, we, _les braves chevaliers d’industrie_.’

The orator paused to take the tray from the hands of the porter, and placed it near to his hand on the table.

‘Excuse me, gentlemen.... Here, my good man, take this ... and by the way, when you go out shut the door close behind you.’

‘Very good, your Excellency!’ the porter bawled in jest.

The orator drank off half a glass and continued: ‘However, let us leave aside the philosophical, social, and economic aspects of the question. I do not wish to fatigue your attention. I must nevertheless point out that our profession very closely approaches the idea of that which is called art. Into it enter all the elements which go to form

art--vocation, inspiration, fantasy, inventiveness, ambition, and a long and arduous apprenticeship to the science. From it is absent virtue alone, concerning which the great Karamzin wrote with such stupendous and fiery fascination. Gentlemen, nothing is further from my intention than to trifle with you and waste your precious time with idle paradoxes; but I cannot avoid expounding my idea briefly. To an outsider's ear it sounds absurdly wild and ridiculous to speak of the vocation of a thief. However, I venture to assure you that this vocation is a reality. There are men who possess a peculiarly strong visual memory, sharpness and accuracy of eye, presence of mind, dexterity of hand, and above all a subtle sense of touch, who are as it were born into God's world for the sole and special purpose of becoming distinguished card-sharpers. The pickpockets' profession demands extraordinary nimbleness and agility, a terrific certainty of movement, not to mention a ready wit, a talent for observation and strained attention. Some have a positive vocation for breaking open safes: from their tenderest childhood they are attracted by the mysteries of every kind of complicated mechanism--bicycles, sewing machines, clock-work toys and watches. Finally, gentlemen, there are people with an hereditary animus against private property. You may call this phenomenon degeneracy. But I tell you that you cannot entice a true thief, and thief by vocation, into the prose of honest vegetation by any gingerbread reward, or by the offer of a secure position, or by the gift of money, or by a woman's love: because there is here a permanent beauty of risk, a fascinating abyss of danger, the delightful sinking of the heart, the impetuous pulsation of life, the ecstasy! You are armed with the protection of the law, by locks, revolvers, telephones, police and soldiery; but we only by our own dexterity, cunning and fearlessness. We are the foxes, and society--is a chicken-run guarded by dogs. Are you aware that the most artistic and gifted natures in our villages become horse-thieves and poachers? What would you have? Life has been so meagre, so insipid, so intolerably dull to eager and high-spirited souls!

'I pass on to inspiration. Gentlemen, doubtless you have had to read of thefts that were supernatural in design and execution. In the headlines of the newspapers they are called "An Amazing Robbery," or "An Ingenious Swindle," or again "A Clever Ruse of the Mobsmen." In such cases our bourgeois pater-familias waves his hands and exclaims: "What a terrible thing! If only their abilities were turned to good--their inventiveness, their amazing knowledge of human psychology, their self-possession, their fearlessness, their incomparable histrionic powers! What extraordinary benefits they would bring to the country!" But it is well known that the bourgeois pater-familias was specially

devised by Heaven to utter commonplaces and trivialities. I myself sometimes--we thieves are sentimental people, I confess--I myself sometimes admire a beautiful sunset in Alexandra Park or by the sea-shore. And I am always certain beforehand that some one near me will say with infallible _aplomb_: “Look at it. If it were put into a picture no one would ever believe it!” I turn round and naturally I see a self-satisfied, full-fed pater-familias, who delights in repeating some one else’s silly statement as though it were his own. As for our dear country, the bourgeois pater-familias looks upon it as though it were a roast turkey. If you’ve managed to cut the best part of the bird for yourself, eat it quietly in a comfortable corner and praise God. But he’s not really the important person. I was led away by my detestation of vulgarity and I apologise for the digression. The real point is that genius and inspiration, even when they are not devoted to the service of the Orthodox Church, remain rare and beautiful things. Progress is a law--and theft too has its creation.

‘Finally, our profession is by no means as easy and pleasant as it seems to the first glance. It demands long experience, constant practice, slow and painful apprenticeship. It comprises in itself hundreds of supple, skilful processes that the cleverest juggler cannot compass. That I may not give you only empty words, gentlemen, I will perform a few experiments before you, now. I ask you to have every confidence in the demonstrators. We are all at present in the enjoyment of legal freedom, and though we are usually watched, and every one of us is known by face, and our photographs adorn the albums of all detective departments, for the time being we are not under the necessity of hiding ourselves from anybody. If any one of you should recognise any of us in the future under different circumstances, we ask you earnestly always to act in accordance with your professional duties and your obligations as citizens. In grateful return for your kind attention we have decided to declare your property inviolable, and to invest it with a thieves’ taboo. However, I proceed to business.’

The orator turned round and gave an order: ‘Sesoi the Great, will you come this way!’

An enormous fellow with a stoop, whose hands reached to his knees, without a forehead or a neck, like a big, fair Hercules, came forward. He grinned stupidly and rubbed his left eyebrow in his confusion.

‘Can’t do nothin’ here,’ he said hoarsely.

The gentleman in the sandy suit spoke for him, turning to the committee.

‘Gentlemen, before you stands a respected member of our association. His speciality is breaking open safes, iron strong boxes, and other receptacles for monetary tokens. In his night work he sometimes avails himself of the electric current of the lighting installation for fusing metals. Unfortunately he has nothing on which he can demonstrate the best items of his repertoire. He will open the most elaborate lock irreproachably.... By the way, this door here, it’s locked, is it not?’

Every one turned to look at the door, on which a printed notice hung: ‘Stage Door. Strictly Private.’

‘Yes, the door’s locked, evidently,’ the chairman agreed.

‘Admirable. Sesoi the Great, will you be so kind?’

‘’Tain’t nothin’ at all,’ said the giant leisurely.

He went close to the door, shook it cautiously with his hand, took out of his pocket a small bright instrument, bent down to the keyhole, made some almost imperceptible movements with the tool, suddenly straightened and flung the door wide in silence. The chairman had his watch in his hands. The whole affair took only ten seconds.

‘Thank you, Sesoi the Great,’ said the gentleman in the sandy suit politely. ‘You may go back to your seat.’

But the chairman interrupted in some alarm: ‘Excuse me. This is all very interesting and instructive, but ... is it included in your esteemed colleague’s profession to be able to lock the door again?’

‘Ah, _mille pardons_.’ The gentleman bowed hurriedly. ‘It slipped my mind. Sesoi the Great, would you oblige?’

The door was locked with the same adroitness and the same silence. The esteemed colleague waddled back to his friends, grinning.

‘Now I will have the honour to show you the skill of one of our comrades who is in the line of picking pockets in theatres and railway-stations,’ continued the orator. ‘He is still very young, but you may to some extent judge from the delicacy of his present work of the heights he will attain by diligence. Yasha!’ A swarthy youth in a blue silk blouse and long glacé boots, like a gipsy, came forward with a swagger, fingering the tassels of his belt, and merrily screwing up

his big, impudent black eyes with yellow whites.

‘Gentlemen,’ said the gentleman in the sandy suit persuasively, ‘I must ask if one of you would be kind enough to submit himself to a little experiment. I assure you this will be an exhibition only, just a game.’

He looked round over the seated company.

The short plump Karaim, black as a beetle, came forward from his table.

‘At your service,’ he said amusingly.

‘Yasha!’ The orator signed with his head.

Yasha came close to the solicitor. On his left arm, which was bent, hung a bright-coloured, figured scarf.

‘Suppose yer in church, or at a bar in one of the ’alls,--or watchin’ a circus,’ he began in a sugary, fluent voice. ‘I see straight off--there’s a toff.... Excuse me, sir. Suppose you’re the toff. There’s no offence--just means a rich gent, decent enough, but don’t know his way about. First--what’s he likely to ’ave about ’im? All sorts. Mostly, a ticker and a chain. Whereabouts does ’e keep ’em. Somewhere in ’is top weskit pocket--’ere. Others ’ave ’em in the bottom pocket. Just ’ere. Purse--most always in the trousers, except when a greeny keeps it in ’is jacket. Cigar-case. ’Ave a look first what it is--gold, silver--with a monogram. Leather--wot decent man’d soil ’is ’ands? Cigar-case. Seven pockets: ’ere, ’ere ’ere, up there, there, ’ere and ’ere again. That’s right, ain’t it? That’s ’ow you go to work.’

As he spoke the young man smiled. His eyes shone straight into the barrister’s. With a quick, dexterous movement of his right hand he pointed to various portions of his clothes.

‘Then agen you might see a pin ’ere in the tie. ’Owever we do not appropriate. Such _gents_ nowadays--they ’ardly ever wear a reel stone. Then I comes up to ’im. I begin straight off to talk to ’im like a gent: “Sir, would you be so kind as to give me a light from your cigarette”--or something of the sort. At any rate, I enter into conversation. Wot’s next? I look ’im straight in the peepers, just like this. Only two of me fingers are at it--just this and this.’ Yasha lifted two fingers of his right hand on a level with the solicitor’s face, the forefinger and the middle finger and moved them about.

‘D’ you see? With these two fingers I run over the ’ole pianner. Nothin’ wonderful in it: one, two, three--ready. Any man who wasn’t stupid could learn easily. That’s all it is. Most ordinary business. I thank you.’

The pickpocket swung on his heel as if to return to his seat.

‘Yasha!’ The gentleman in the sandy suit said with meaning weight. ‘Yasha!’ he repeated sternly.

Yasha stopped. His back was turned to the barrister, but he evidently gave his representative an imploring look, because the latter frowned and shook his head.

‘Yasha!’ he said for the third time, in a threatening tone.

‘Huh!’ The young thief grunted in vexation and turned to face the solicitor. ‘Where’s your little watch, sir?’ he said in a piping voice.

‘Ach,’ the Karaim brought himself up sharp.

‘You see--now you say “Ach,”’ Yasha continued reproachfully. ‘All the while you were admiring me right ‘and, I was operatin’ yer watch with my left. Just with these two little fingers, under the scarf. That’s why we carry a scarf. Since your chain’s not worth anything--a present from some _mamselle_ and the watch is a gold one, I’ve left you the chain as a keep-sake. Take it,’ he added with a sigh, holding out the watch.

‘But.... That is clever,’ the barrister said in confusion. ‘I didn’t notice it at all.’

‘That’s our business,’ Yasha said with pride.

He swaggered back to his comrades. Meantime the orator took a drink from his glass and continued.

‘Now, gentlemen, our next collaborator will give you an exhibition of some ordinary card tricks, which are worked at fairs, on steamboats and railways. With three cards, for instance, an ace, a queen, and a six, he can quite easily.... But perhaps you are tired of these demonstrations, gentlemen.’ ...

‘Not at all. It’s extremely interesting,’ the chairman answered

affably. ‘I should like to ask one question--that is if it is not too indiscreet--what is your own speciality?’

‘Mine.... H’m.... No, how could it be an indiscretion?... I work the big diamond shops ... and my other business is banks,’ answered the orator with a modest smile. ‘Don’t think this occupation is easier than others. Enough that I know four European languages, German, French, English, and Italian, without speaking of Polish, Ukrainian and Yiddish. But shall I show you some more experiments, Mr. Chairman?’

The chairman looked at his watch.

‘Unfortunately the time is too short,’ he said. ‘Wouldn’t it be better to pass on to the substance of your business? Besides the experiments we have just seen have amply convinced us of the talent of your esteemed associates.... Am I not right, Isaac Abramovich?’

‘Yes, yes ... absolutely,’ the Karaim barrister readily confirmed.

‘Admirable,’ the gentleman in the sandy suit kindly agreed. ‘My dear Count’--he turned to a blonde, curly-haired man, with a face like a billiard-maker on a bank-holiday--‘put your instruments away. They will not be wanted. I have only a few words more to say, gentlemen. Now that you have convinced yourselves that our art, although it does not enjoy the patronage of high-placed individuals, is nevertheless an art; and you have probably come to my opinion that this art is one which demands many personal qualities besides constant labour, danger, and unpleasant misunderstandings--you will also, I hope, believe that it is possible to become attached to its practice and to love and esteem it, however strange that may appear at first sight. Picture to yourselves that a famous poet of talent, whose tales and poems adorn the pages of our best magazines, is suddenly offered the chance of writing verses at a penny a line, signed into the bargain, as an advertisement for “Cigarettes Jasmine”--or that a slander was spread about one of you distinguished barristers, accusing him of making a business of concocting evidence for divorce cases, or of writing petitions from the cabmen to the governor in public-houses! Certainly your relatives, friends and acquaintances wouldn’t believe it. But the rumour has already done its poisonous work, and you have to live through minutes of torture. Now picture to yourselves that such a disgraceful and vexatious slander, started by God knows whom, begins to threaten not only your good name and your quiet digestion, but your freedom, your health, and even your life!

‘This is the position of us thieves, now being slandered by the newspapers. I must explain. There is in existence a class of scum--_passez-moi le mot_--whom we call their “Mothers’ Darlings.” With these we are unfortunately confused. They have neither shame nor conscience, a dissipated riff-raff, mothers’ useless darlings, idle, clumsy drones, shop assistants who commit unskilful thefts. He thinks nothing of living on his mistress, a prostitute, like the male mackerel, who always swims after the female and lives on her excrements. He is capable of robbing a child with violence in a dark alley, in order to get a penny: he will kill a man in his sleep and torture an old woman. These men are the pests of our profession. For them the beauties and the traditions of the art have no existence. They watch us real, talented thieves like a pack of jackals after a lion. Suppose I’ve managed to bring off an important job--we won’t mention the fact that I have to leave two-thirds of what I get to the receivers who sell the goods and discount the notes, or the customary subsidies to our incorruptible police--I still have to share out something to each one of these parasites, who have got wind of my job, by accident, hearsay, or a casual glance.

‘So we call them _Motients_, which means “half,” a corruption of _moitié_.... Original etymology. I pay him only because he knows and may inform against me. And it mostly happens that even when he’s got his share he runs off to the police in order to get another half-sovereign. We, honest thieves.... Yes, you may laugh, gentlemen, but I repeat it: we honest thieves detest these reptiles. We have another name for them, a stigma of ignominy; but I dare not utter it here out of respect for the place and for my audience. Oh, yes, they would gladly accept an invitation to a pogrom. The thought that we may be confused with them is a hundred times more insulting to us even than the accusation of taking part in a pogrom.

‘Gentlemen! While I have been speaking, I have often noticed smiles on your faces. I understand you: our presence here, our application for your assistance, and above all the unexpectedness of such a phenomenon as a systematic organisation of thieves, with delegates who are thieves, and a leader of the deputation, also a thief by profession--it is all so original that it must inevitably arouse a smile. But now I will speak from the depth of my heart. Let us be rid of our outward wrappings, gentlemen, let us speak as men to men.

‘Almost all of us are educated, and all love books. We don’t only read the adventures of Roqueambole, as the realistic writers say of us. Do you think our hearts did not bleed and our cheeks did not burn from

shame, as though we had been slapped in the face, all the time that this unfortunate, disgraceful, accursed, cowardly war lasted. Do you really think that our souls do not flame with anger when our country is lashed with Cossack-whips, and trodden underfoot, shot and spit at by mad, exasperated men? Will you not believe that we thieves meet every step towards the liberation to come with a thrill of ecstasy?

'We understand, every one of us--perhaps only a little less than you barristers, gentlemen--the real sense of the pogroms. Every time that some dastardly event or some ignominious failure has occurred, after executing a martyr in a dark corner of a fortress, or after deceiving public confidence, some one who is hidden and unapproachable gets frightened of the people's anger and diverts its vicious element upon the heads of innocent Jews. Whose diabolical mind invents these pogroms--these titanic blood-lettings, these cannibal amusements for the dark, bestial souls?

'We all see with certain clearness that the last convulsions of the bureaucracy are at hand. Forgive me if I present it imaginatively. There was a people that had a chief temple, wherein dwelt a bloodthirsty deity, behind a curtain, guarded by priests. Once fearless hands tore the curtain away. Then all the people saw, instead of a god, a huge, shaggy, voracious spider, like a loathsome cuttlefish. They beat it and shoot at it: it is dismembered already; but still in the frenzy of its final agony it stretches over all the ancient temple its disgusting, clawing tentacles. And the priests, themselves under sentence of death, push into the monster's grasp all whom they can seize in their terrified, trembling fingers.

'Forgive me. What I have said is probably wild and incoherent. But I am somewhat agitated. Forgive me. I continue. We thieves by profession know better than any one else how these pogroms were organised. We wander everywhere: into public houses, markets, tea-shops, doss-houses, public places, the harbour. We can swear before God and man and posterity that we have seen how the police organise the massacres, without shame and almost without concealment. We know them all by face, in uniform or disguise. They invited many of us to take part; but there was none so vile among us as to give even the outward consent that fear might have extorted.

'You know, of course, how the various strata of Russian society behave towards the police? It is not even respected by those who avail themselves of its dark services. But we despise and hate it three, ten times more--not because many of us have been tortured in the detective

departments, which are just chambers of horror, beaten almost to death, beaten with whips of ox-hide and of rubber in order to extort a confession or to make us betray a comrade. Yes, we hate them for that too. But we thieves, all of us who have been in prison, have a mad passion for freedom. Therefore we despise our gaolers with all the hatred that a human heart can feel. I will speak for myself. I have been tortured three times by police detectives till I was half dead. My lungs and liver have been shattered. In the mornings I spit blood until I can breathe no more. But if I were told that I will be spared a fourth flogging only by shaking hands with a chief of the detective police, I would refuse to do it!

‘And then the newspapers say that we took from these hands Judas-money, dripping with human blood. No, gentlemen, it is a slander which stabs our very soul, and inflicts insufferable pain. Not money, nor threats, nor promises will suffice to make us mercenary murderers of our brethren, nor accomplices with them.’

‘Never.... No ..., No his comrades standing behind him began to murmur.

‘I will say more,’ the thief continued. ‘Many of us protected the victims during this pogrom. Our friend, called Sesoi the Great--you have just seen him, gentlemen--was then lodging with a Jewish braid-maker on the Moldavanka. With a poker in his hands he defended his landlord from a great horde of assassins. It is true, Sesoi the Great is a man of enormous physical strength, and this is well known to many of the inhabitants of the Moldavanka. But you must agree, gentlemen, that in these moments Sesoi the Great looked straight into the face of death. Our comrade Martin the Miner--this gentleman here’--the orator pointed to a pale, bearded man with beautiful eyes who was holding himself in the background--‘saved an old Jewess, whom he had never seen before, who was being pursued by a crowd of these _canaille_. They broke his head with a crowbar for his pains, smashed his arm in two places and splintered a rib. He is only just out of hospital. That is the way our most ardent and determined members acted. The others trembled for anger and wept for their own impotence.

‘None of us will forget the horrors of those bloody days and bloody nights lit up by the glare of fires, those sobbing women, those little children’s bodies torn to pieces and left lying in the street. But for all that not one of us thinks that the police and the mob are the real origin of the evil. These tiny, stupid, loathsome vermin are only a senseless fist that is governed by a vile, calculating mind, moved by a diabolical will.

‘Yes, gentlemen,’ the orator continued, ‘we thieves have nevertheless merited your legal contempt. But when you, noble gentlemen, need the help of clever, brave, obedient men at the barricades, men who will be ready to meet death with a song and a jest on their lips for the most glorious word in the world--Freedom--will you cast us off then and order us away because of an inveterate revulsion? Damn it all, the first victim in the French Revolution was a prostitute. She jumped up on to a barricade, with her skirt caught elegantly up into her hand and called out: “Which of you soldiers will dare to shoot a woman?” Yes, by God.’ The orator exclaimed aloud and brought down his fist on to the marble table top: ‘They killed her, but her action was magnificent, and the beauty of her words immortal.

‘If you should drive us away on the great day, we will turn to you and say: “You spotless Cherubim--if human thoughts had the power to wound, kill, and rob man of honour and property, then which of you innocent doves would not deserve the knout and imprisonment for life?” Then we will go away from you and build our own gay, sporting, desperate thieves’ barricade, and will die with such united songs on our lips that you will envy us, you who are whiter than snow!

‘But I have been once more carried away. Forgive me. I am at the end. You now see, gentlemen, what feelings the newspaper slanders have excited in us. Believe in our sincerity and do what you can to remove the filthy stain which has so unjustly been cast upon us. I have finished.’

He went away from the table and joined his comrades. The barristers were whispering in an undertone, very much as the magistrates of the bench at sessions. Then the chairman rose.

‘We trust you absolutely, and we will make every effort to clear your association of this most grievous charge. At the same time my colleagues have authorised me, gentlemen, to convey to you their deep respect for your passionate feelings as citizens. And for my own part I ask the leader of the deputation for permission to shake him by the hand.’

The two men, both tall and serious, held each other’s hands in a strong, masculine grip.

* * * * *

The barristers were leaving the theatre; but four of them hung back a little by the clothes peg in the hall. Isaac Abramovich could not find his new, smart grey hat anywhere. In its place on the wooden peg hung a cloth cap jauntily flattened in on either side.

‘Yasha!’ The stern voice of the orator was suddenly heard from the other side of the door. ‘Yasha! It’s the last time I’ll speak to you, curse you!... Do you hear?’

The heavy door opened wide. The gentleman in the sandy suit entered. In his hands he held Isaac Abramovich’s hat; on his face was a well-bred smile.

‘Gentlemen, for Heaven’s sake forgive us--an odd little misunderstanding. One of our comrades exchanged his hat quite by accident.... Oh, it is yours! A thousand pardons. Doorkeeper! Why don’t you keep an eye on things, my good fellow, eh? Just give me that cap, there. Once more, I ask you to forgive me, gentlemen.’

With a pleasant bow and the same well-bred smile he made his way quickly into the street.

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ALWAYS ON DETACHMENT
The Project Gutenberg EBook of Tales of the Wilderness, by Boris Pilniak

Alexander Alexandrovitch Agrenev, engineer, spent all day in the quarry, laying and exploding dynamite. In the village below was a factory, its chimneys belching smoke; and creaking wagonettes sped backwards and forwards from the parapet. Above on the cliff stood huge sappy pines. All day the sky was grey and cloudy, and the smoke from the chimneys spread like a low pall over the earth. The dynamite exploded with a great detonation and expulsion of smoke.

The autumn darkness, with its sharp, acid, sweet tang, was already falling as Agrenev proceeded homeward with the head-miner, Eduardovich Bitska, a Lithuanian, and the lights from the engine-house shone brightly in the distance.

The engineer's quarters lay in a forest-clearing on the further side of the valley; the cement structures of its small buildings stood out

in monotonous uniformity; the blue light of its torches flared and hissed, throwing back dark shadows from the trunks and branches of the pine-trees, which laced, interlaced, and glided dusky and intangible between the tall straight stems, finally melting amidst the foliage.

His skin jacket was sticking to Agrenev's back, as, no doubt, Bitska's was also.

"My missus will soon be home," Bitska said cheerfully--he had recently been married. He spoke in broken Russian, with a foreign accent.

In Agrenev's house it was dark. The warm glow from the torches outside fell on the window-ledges and illuminated them, but inside the only light was that visible through the crevices of his wife's tightly closed door: his beloved wife--so aloof--so strange. The rain had started, and its drip on the roof was like the sound of water-falls: he changed, washed, took up a newspaper. The maid entered and announced that tea was ready.

His wife--tall, slim, beautiful, and strange--was standing by the window, her back to him, a book in her hand; a tumbler was on the window-sill close beside her. She did not turn round as he entered, merely murmuring: "Have some tea."

The electric light gave a brilliant glow. The freshly varnished woodwork smelt of polish. She did not say another word, but returned to her book, her delicate fingers turning over the leaves as, standing with bent head, she read.

"Are you going out this evening, Anna?" he asked.

"Eh? No, I am staying in."

"Is there anyone coming?"

"Eh? No, nobody. Are _you_ going out?"

"I am not sure. I am going to-morrow on Detachment duty for a week."

"Eh? Oh yes, on Detachment."

Always the same! No interest in him; indifferent, absorbed in other

things. How he longed to stay and talk to her, on and on, of everything; of the utter impossibility of life without love or sympathy, of the intensity of his own love, and the melancholy of his evenings. But he was silent.

"Is Asya asleep?" he inquired at last.

"Yes, she is asleep."

A nickel tea-pot and a solitary tumbler stood on the table with its white cloth falling in straight folds. The ticking of the clock sounded monotonously.

"She does not deceive, nor betray, nor leave me," he thought; "but she is strange, strange--and a mother!"

II

At last the earth was cloaked in darkness, the torches hung like gleaming balls of fire, the pattering of the rain echoed dismally, and above it, drowning all other sounds, was the dreary roar of the factory.

He sauntered through the straight-cut avenues of the park towards his club, but near the school turned aside and went in to see Nina. They had known each other from childhood, attending the same school, Nina his faithful comrade and devoted slave--and ever since he had remained for her the one and only man, for she was of those who love but once. Since then she had been flung about Russia, striven to retain her honour, vainly tilting against the windmills of poverty and temptation--had failed, been broken, and now had crept back that she might live near him.

He walked through the school's dark corridors and knocked.

"Come in."

Alone, in a grey dress, plain-featured, her cheek red where it had rested against the palm of her hand, she sat beside a little table in the bare, simple room, a book on her lap. With a pang, Agrenev noted her sunken eyes. But at sight of him they brightened instantly, and she rose from her seat, putting the book aside.

"You darling? Welcome! Is it raining?"

"Greeting! Nina. I have just come in for a moment."

"Take off your coat," she urged. "You will have some tea?" Her eyes and outstretched hands both said: "Thank you, thank you." "How are you doing?" she asked him anxiously.

"I am bored. I can do nothing. I am utterly bored."

She placed the tea-urn on the table in her tiny kitchen, laid some pots of jam by her copy-book, seated him in the solitary armchair, and bustled round, all smiles, her cheeks flushing--the spot where she had rested her hand all the long evening still showing red,--all-loving, all-surrendering, yet undesired.

"You musn't wait on me like this, Nina," Agrenev protested;"... Sit down and let us talk."

Their hands touched caressingly, and she sat down beside him.

"What is it, my dear?" She stroked his hand and its touch warmed her! "What is it?"

At times indignation overcame her at the thought of life; she wrung her hands, spoke with hatred, and her eyes darkened in anger. At times she fell on her knees in tears and supplication; but with Alexander Alexandrovitch she was always tender, with the tenderness of unrequited love.

"What is it, darling?"

"I am bored, Nina. She ... Anna ... does not love me; she does not leave me, nor deceive me, but neither does she love me. I know you love ..."

At home four walls ... Coldness ... The miner, Bitska, making jokes all day in the rain ... the fuse to be lighted in the quarry, the slow igniting to be watched. Thirty years had been lived ... five-tenths of his life ... a half ... ten-twentieths. It was like a blank cartridge ... no kindness ... a life without feeling ... all blank ...

The lamp seemed to go out and something warm lay over his eyes. The palm of a hand. Nina's words were calm at first; then they grew frantic.

"Leave her, leave her, darling! Come to me, to me who wants you! What if she doesn't love you? I do, I love you ..."

He was silent.

"You say nothing? I will give you all; you shall have everything! Come to me, to me who will give to you so gladly! She is as dead; she needs nothing! Do you hear? You have me ... I will take all the suffering on myself ..."

* * * * * * *

The lamp streamed forth clearly again. A little grey clod of humanity fell on to the maiden's narrow bed.

It was so intensely dark that the blackness seemed to close in on one like a great wall, and it was difficult to see two paces ahead. Close to the barracks some men were bawling to the music of a mouth-organ. Under cover of the gloom someone whistled between his fingers, babbling insolence and nonsense. The torches glowed through the tangled network of branches and leaves like globes of fire.

Agrenev walked along, carrying a lantern, by the light of which he mechanically picked his steps; close to his heels, Nina hurried through the darkness and puddles. On every side there was the rustling of pines, hundreds of them, their immense stems towering upwards into obscurity. Although invisible, their presence could be felt. The place was wild and dreary, odours of earth, moss, and pine-sap mingled together in an overpowering perfume; it was the heart of a vast primeval forest. Agrenev murmured as if to himself:

"No, Nina, I do not love you. I want nothing from you.... Anna ... her father ordered her to marry me.... Ancient blood.... Anna told me she would never love.... Asya is growing up under her influence.... I love my little daughter ... yet she is strange too ... she looks at me with vacant eyes ... my daughter! I stole her mother out of a void! I go home and lie down alone ... or I go to Anna and she receives me with compressed lips. I do not want a daughter from you, Nina ... Why should I? To-morrow will ... be the same as yesterday."

By the door of his house in the engineer's quarters, he remembered Nina, and all at once became solicitous:

"You will catch cold, my dear. It will be terrible for you getting back ..."

He stood before her a moment silently; then stretched out his hand:

"Well, the best of luck, my dear!"

A band of youths strolled by. One of them flashed a lantern-light on the doorway.

"Aha! Sky-larking with the engineers! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

They began chattering among themselves and sang in chorus a ribald doggerel:

"Once upon a time a wench
Appeared before a judge's bench.."

III

Before he went to bed Agrenev laid out cards to play Patience, ate a cold supper, stood a long time staring at the light from under Anna's door, then knocked.

"Come in."

He entered for a moment, and found her sitting at a table with a book, which she laid down upon an open copybook diary. When, when is he to know what is written there?

He spoke curtly:

"I go to Moscow the first thing to-morrow on Detachment. Here is some money for the housekeeping."

"Thanks. When do you return?"

"In a week--that is, Friday next week. Is there anything you need?"

"No thanks." She rose, came close and kissed him on the cheek near his lips. "A safe journey. Goodbye. Do not waken Asya."

And she turned away, sat down at the table, and took up her book

again.

In the early hours of the morning a horse was yoked, and Agrenev drove with Bitska over the main road to the station. It was wet. The sombre figures of workmen were dimly seen through the rain and darkness, hastening to the factory. The staff drove round in a motor as the shrill sound of the factory horn split the silence.

Bitska in a bowler-hat, red-faced, with thin whiskers such as are worn by the Letts, looked gravely round:

"You have not slept, Robert Edouardovitch?" asked Agrenev.

"No, I have not, and I am not in a good humour either." The man was silent a moment, then burst out; "Now I am forty years, and my vife she is eighteen. I am in vants of an earnest housekeeper. But my vife, she is always jesting and dragging me by the--how do you call it--the beard! And laughing and larking...." His little narrow eyes wrinkled up into a wry smile: "Ah, the larking vench!"

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THE SNOWSTORM.
The Project Gutenberg EBook of The Queen of Spades and other stories, by Alexander Pushkin

Towards the end of 1811, at a memorable period for Russians, lived on his own domain of Nenaradova the kind-hearted Gravril R. He was celebrated in the whole district for his hospitality and his genial character. Neighbours constantly visited him to have something to eat and drink, and to play at five-copeck boston with his wife, Praskovia. Some, too, went to have a look at their daughter, Maria; a tall pale girl of seventeen. She was an heiress, and they desired her either for themselves or for their sons.

Maria had been brought up on French novels, and consequently was in love. The object of her affection was a poor ensign in the army, who was now at home in his small village on leave of absence. As a matter of course, the young man reciprocated Maria's passion. But the parents of his beloved, noticing their mutual attachment, forbade their daughter even to think of him, while they received him worse than an ex-assize judge.

Our lovers corresponded, and met alone daily in the pine wood or by the old roadway chapel. There they vowed everlasting love, inveighed against fate, and exchanged various suggestions. Writing and talking in this way, they quite naturally reached the following conclusion:--

If we cannot exist apart from each other, and if the tyranny of hard-hearted parents throws obstacles in the way of our happiness, then can we not manage without them?

Of course, this happy idea originated in the mind of the young man; but it pleased the romantic imagination of Maria immensely.

Winter set in and put a stop to their meetings. But their correspondence became all the more active. Vladimir begged Maria in every letter to give herself up to him that they might get married secretly, hide for a while, and then throw themselves at the feet of the parents, who would of course in the end be touched by their heroic constancy and say to them, "Children, come to our arms!"

Maria hesitated a long while, and out of many different plans proposed, that of flight was for a time rejected. At last, however, she consented. On the appointed day she was to decline supper, and retire to her room under the plea of a headache. She and her maid, who was in the secret, were then to go out into the garden by the back stairs, and beyond the garden they would find a sledge ready for them, would get into it and drive a distance of five miles from Nenaradova, to the village of Jadrino, straight to the church, where Vladimir would be waiting for them.

On the eve of the decisive day, Maria did not sleep all night; she was packing and tying up linen and dresses. She wrote, moreover, a long letter to a friend of hers, a sentimental young lady; and another to her parents. Of the latter, she took leave in the most touching terms. She excused the step she was taking by reason of the unconquerable power of love, and wound up by declaring that she should consider it the happiest moment of her life when she was allowed to throw herself at the feet of her dearest parents. Sealing both letters with a Toula seal, on which were engraven two flaming hearts with an appropriate inscription, she at last threw herself upon her bed before daybreak and dozed off, though even then she was awake tied from one moment to another by terrible thoughts. First it seemed to her that at the moment of entering the sledge in order to go and get married her father stopped her, and with cruel rapidity dragged her over the snow and

threw her into a dark bottomless cellar, down which she fell headlong with an indescribable sinking of the heart. Then she saw Vladimir, lying on the grass, pale and bleeding; with his dying breath he implored her to make haste and marry him. Other hideous and senseless visions floated before her one after another. Finally she rose paler than usual, and with, a real headache.

Both her father and her mother remarked her indisposition. Their tender anxiety and constant inquiries, "What is the matter with you, Masha--are you ill?" cut her to the heart. She tried to pacify them and to appear cheerful; but she could not. Evening set in. The idea that she was passing the day for the last time in the midst of her family oppressed her. In her secret heart she took leave of everybody, of everything which surrounded her.

Supper was served; her heart beat violently. In a trembling voice she declared that she did not want any supper, and wished her father and mother good-night. They kissed her, and as usual blessed her; and she nearly wept.

Reaching her own room she threw herself into an easy chair and burst into tears. Her maid begged her to be calm and take courage. Everything was ready. In half-an-hour Masha would leave for ever her parents' house, her own room, her peaceful life as a young girl.

Out of doors the snow was falling, the wind howling. The shutters rattled and shook. In everything she seemed to recognise omens and threats.

Soon the whole home was quiet and asleep. Masha wrapped herself in a shawl, put on a warm cloak, and with a box in her hand passed out on to the back staircase. The maid carried two bundles after her. They descended into the garden. The snowstorm raged: a strong wind blew against them as if trying to stop the young culprit. With difficulty they reached the end of the garden. In the road a sledge awaited them.

The horses from cold would not stand still. Vladimir's coachman was walking to and fro in front of them, trying to quiet them. He helped the young lady and her maid to their seats, and packing away the bundles and the dressing-case took up the reins, and the horses flew forward into the darkness of the night.

* * * * *

Having entrusted the young lady to the care of fate and of Tereshka the coachman, let us return to the young lover.

Vladimir had spent the whole day in driving. In the morning he had called on the Jadrino priest, and, with difficulty, came to terms with him. Then he went to seek for witnesses from amongst the neighbouring gentry. The first on whom he called was a former cornet of horse, Dravin by name, a man in his forties, who consented at once. The adventure, he declared, reminded him of old times and of his larks when he was in the Hussars. He persuaded Vladimir to stop to dinner with him, assuring him that there would be no difficulty in getting the other two witnesses. Indeed, immediately after dinner in came the surveyor Schmidt, with a moustache and spurs, and the son of a captain-magistrate, a boy of sixteen, who had recently entered the Uhlans. They not only accepted Vladimir's proposal, but even swore that they were ready to sacrifice their lives for him. Vladimir embraced them with delight, and drove off to get everything ready.

It had long been dark. Vladimir despatched his trustworthy Tereshka to Nenaradova with his two-horsed sledge, and with appropriate instructions for the occasion. For himself he ordered the small sledge with one horse, and started alone without a coachman for Jadrino, where Maria ought to arrive in a couple of hours. He knew the road, and the drive would only occupy twenty minutes.

But Vladimir had scarcely passed from the enclosure into the open field when the wind rose, and soon there was a driving snowstorm so heavy and so severe that he could not see. In a moment the road was covered with snow. All landmarks disappeared in the murky yellow darkness, through which fell white flakes of snow. Sky and earth became merged into one. Vladimir, in the midst of the field, tried in vain to get to the road.
The horse walked on at random, and every moment stepped either into deep snow or into a rut, so that the sledge was constantly upsetting. Vladimir tried at least not to lose the right direction; but it seemed to him that more than half an hour had passed, and he had not yet reached the Jadrino wood. Another ten minutes passed, and still the wood was invisible. Vladimir drove across fields intersected by deep ditches. The snowstorm did not abate, and the sky did not clear. The horse was getting tired and the perspiration rolled from him like hail, in spite of the fact that every moment his legs were disappearing in the snow.

At last Vladimir found that he was going in the wrong direction. He stopped; began to reflect, recollect, and consider; till at last he

became convinced that he ought to have turned to the right. He did so now. His horse could scarcely drag along. But he had been more than an hour on the road, and Jadrino could not now be far. He drove and drove, but there was no getting out of the field. Still snow-drifts and ditches. Every moment the sledge was upset, and every moment Vladimir had to raise it up.

Time was slipping by, and Vladimir grew seriously anxious. At last in the distance some dark object could be seen.

Vladimir turned in its direction, and as he drew near found it was a wood.

"Thank Heaven," he thought, "I am now near the end."

He drove by the side of the wood, hoping to come at once upon the familiar road, or, if not, to pass round the wood. Jadrino was situated immediately behind it.

He soon found the road, and passed into the darkness of the wood, now stripped by the winter. The wind could not rage here; the road was smooth, the horse picked up courage, and Vladimir was comforted.

He drove and drove, but still Jadrino was not to be seen; there was no end to the wood. Then to his horror he discovered that he had got into a strange wood. He was in despair. He whipped his horse, and the poor animal started off at a trot. But it soon got tired, and in a quarter of an hour, in spite of all poor Vladimir's efforts, could only crawl.

Gradually the trees became thinner, and Vladimir drove out of the wood, but Jadrino was not to be seen. It must have been about midnight. Tears gushed from the young man's eyes. He drove on at random; and now the weather abated, the clouds dispersed, and before him was a wide stretch of plain, covered with a white billowy carpet. The night was comparatively clear, and he could see a small village a short distance off, which consisted of four or five cottages. Vladimir drove towards it. At the first door he jumped out of the sledge, ran up to the window, and tapped. After a few minutes a wooden, shutter was raised, and an old man stuck out his grey beard.

"What do you want?"

"How far is Jadrino?"

"How far is Jadrino?"

"Yes, yes! Is it far?"

"Not far; about ten miles."

At this answer Vladimir clutched hold of his hair, and stood motionless, like a man condemned to death.

"Where do you come from?" added the man. Vladimir had not the courage to reply.

"My man," he said, "can you procure me horses to Jadrino?"

"We have no horses," answered the peasant.

"Could I find a guide? I will pay him any sum he likes."

"Stop!" said the old man, dropping the shutter; "I will send my son out to you; he will conduct you."

Vladimir waited. Scarcely a minute had passed when he again knocked. The shutter was lifted and a beard was seen.

"What do you want?"

"What about your son?"

"He'll come out directly: he is putting on his boots. Are you cold? Come in and warm yourself."

"Thanks! Send out your son quickly."

The gate creaked; a youth came out with a cudgel, and walked on in front, at one time pointing out the road, at another looking for it in a mass of drifted snow.

"What o'clock is it?" Vladimir asked him.

"It will soon be daylight," replied the young-peasant. Vladimir spoke not another word.

The cocks were crowing, and it was light when they reached Jadrino. The church was closed. Vladimir paid the guide, and drove into the yard of

the priest's house. In the yard his two-horsed sledge was not to be seen. What news awaited him?

* * * * *

But let us return to the kind proprietors of Nenaradova, and see what is going on there.

Nothing.

The old people awoke, and went into the sitting-room, Gavril in a night-cap and flannel jacket, Praskovia in a wadded dressing-gown. The samovar was brought in, and, Gavril sent the little maid to ask Maria how she was and how she had slept. The little maid returned, saying that her young lady had slept badly, but that she was better now, and that she would come into the sitting-room in a moment. And indeed the door opened, and Maria came in and wished her papa and mamma good morning.

"How is your head-ache, Masha?" (familiar for Mary) inquired Gavril.

"Better, papa; answered Masha.

"The fumes from the stoves must have given you your head-ache," remarked Praskovia.

"Perhaps so, mamma," replied Masha.

The day passed well enough, but in the night Masha was taken ill. A doctor was sent for from town. He came towards evening and found the patient delirious. Soon she was in a severe fever, and in a fortnight the poor patient was on the brink of the grave.

No member of the family knew anything of the flight from home. The letters written by Masha the evening before had been burnt; and the maid, fearing the wrath of the master and mistress, had not breathed a word. The priest, the ex-cornet, the big moustached surveyor, and the little lancer were equally discreet, and with good reason. Tereshka, the coachman, never said too much, not even in his drink. Thus the secret was kept better than it might have been by half a dozen conspirators.

But Maria herself, in the course of her long fever, let out her secret, nevertheless, her words were so disconnected that her mother, who never

left her bedside, could only make out from them that her daughter was desperately in love with Vladimir, and that probably love was the cause of her illness. She consulted her husband and some of her neighbours, and at last it was decided unanimously that the fate of Maria ought not to be interfered with, that a woman must not ride away from the man she is destined to marry, that poverty is no crime, that a woman has to live not with money but with a man, and so on. Moral proverbs are wonderfully useful on such occasions, when we can invent little or nothing in our own justification.

Meanwhile the young lady began to recover. Vladimir had not been seen for a long time in the house of Gravril, so frightened had he been by his previous reception. It was now resolved to send and announce to him the good news which he could scarcely expect: the consent of her parents to his marriage with Maria.

But what was the astonishment of the proprietors of Nenaradova when, in answer to their invitation, they received an insane reply. Vladimir informed them he could never set foot in their house, and begged them to forget an unhappy man whose only hope now was in death. A few days afterwards they heard that Vladimir had left the place and joined the army.

A long time passed before they ventured to tell Masha, who was now recovering. She never mentioned Vladimir. Some months later, however, finding his name in the list of those who had distinguished themselves and been severely wounded at Borodino, she fainted, and it was feared that the fever might return. But, Heaven be thanked! the fainting fit had no bad results.

* * * * *

Maria experienced yet another sorrow. Her father died, leaving her the heiress of all his property. But the inheritance could not console her. She shared sincerely the affliction of her mother, and vowed she would never leave her.

Suitors clustered round the charming heiress; but she gave no one the slightest hope. Her mother sometimes tried to persuade her to choose a companion in life; but Maria shook her head, and grew pensive.

Vladimir no longer existed. He had died at Moscow on the eve of the arrival of the French. His memory was held sacred by Maria, and she treasured up everything that would remind her of him; books he had

read, drawings which he had made; songs he had sung, and the pieces of poetry which he had copied out for her.

The neighbours, hearing all this, wondered at her fidelity, and awaited with curiosity the arrival of the hero who must in the end triumph over the melancholy constancy of this virgin Artemis.

Meanwhile, the war had been brought to a glorious conclusion, and our armies were returning from abroad. The people ran to meet them. The music played, by the regimental bands consisted of war songs, "Vive Henri-Quatre," Tirolese waltzes and airs from Joconde. Nourished on the atmosphere of winter, officers who had started on the campaign mere striplings returned grown men, and covered with decorations. The soldiers conversed gaily among themselves, mingling German and French words every moment in their speech. A time never to be forgotten--a time of glory and delight! How quickly beat the Russian heart at the words, "Native land!" How sweet the tears of meeting! With what unanimity did we combine feelings of national pride with love for the Tsar! And for him, what a moment!

The women--our Russian women--were splendid then. Their usual coldness disappeared. Their delight was really intoxicating when, meeting the conquerors, they cried, "Hurrah!" And they threw up their caps in the air.

Who of the officers of that period does not own that to the Russian women he was indebted for his best and most valued reward? During this brilliant period Maria was living with her mother in retirement, and neither of them saw how, in both the capitals, the returning troops were welcomed. But in the districts and villages the general enthusiasm was, perhaps, even greater.

In these places the appearance of an officer became for him a veritable triumph. The accepted lover in plain clothes fared badly by his side.

We have already said that, in spite of her coldness, Maria was still, as before, surrounded by suitors. But all had to fall in the rear when there arrived at her castle the wounded young colonel of Hussars--Burmin by name--with the order of St. George in his button-hole, and an interesting pallor on his face. He was about twenty-six. He had come home on leave to his estates, which were close to Maria's villa. Maria paid him such attention as none of the others received. In his presence her habitual gloom disappeared. It could not be said that she flirted with him. But a poet, observing her behaviour,

might have asked, "S' amor non è, che dunque?"

Burmin was really a very agreeable young man. He possessed just the kind of sense that pleased women: a sense of what is suitable and becoming. He had no affectation, and was carelessly satirical. His manner towards Maria was simple and easy. He seemed to be of a quiet and modest disposition; but rumour said that he had at one time been terribly wild. This, however, did not harm him in the opinion of Maria, who (like all other young ladies) excused, with pleasure, vagaries which were the result of impulsiveness and daring.

But above all--more than his love-making, more than his pleasant talk, more than his interesting pallor, more even than his bandaged arm--the silence of the young Hussar excited her curiosity and her imagination. She could not help confessing to herself that he pleased her very much. Probably he too, with his acuteness and his experience, had seen that he interested her. How was it, then, that up to this moment she had not seen him at her feet; had not received from him any declaration whatever? And wherefore did she not encourage him with more attention, and, according to circumstances, even with tenderness? Had she a secret of her own which would account for her behaviour?

At last, Burmin fell into such deep meditation, and his black eyes rested with such fire upon Maria, that the decisive moment seemed very near. The neighbours spoke of the marriage as an accomplished fact, and kind Praskovia rejoiced that her daughter had at last found for herself a worthy mate.

The lady was sitting alone once in the drawing-room, laying out grande-patience, when Burmin entered the room, and at once inquired for Maria.

"She is in the garden," replied the old lady: "go to her, and I will wait for you here." Burmin went, and the old lady made the sign of the cross and thought, "Perhaps the affair will be settled to-day!"

Burmin found Maria in the ivy-bower beside the pond, with a book in her hands, and wearing a white dress--a veritable heroine of romance. After the first inquiries, Maria purposely let the conversation drop; increasing by these means the mutual embarrassment, from which it was only possible to escape by means of a sudden and positive declaration.

It happened thus. Burmin, feeling the awkwardness of his position, informed Maria that he had long sought an opportunity of opening his

heart to her, and that he begged for a moment's attention. Maria closed the book and lowered her eyes, as a sign that she was listening.

"I love you," said Burmin, "I love you passionately!" Maria blushed, and bent her head still lower.

"I have behaved imprudently, yielding as I have done to the seductive pleasure of seeing and hearing you daily." Maria recollected the first letter of St. Preux in 'La Nouvelle Héloïse.'

"It is too late now to resist my fate. The remembrance of you, your dear incomparable image, must from to-day be at once the torment and the consolation of my existence. I have now a grave duty to perform, a terrible secret to disclose, which will place between us an insurmountable barrier."

"It has always existed!" interrupted Maria; "I could never have been your wife."

"I know," he replied quickly; "I know that you once loved. But death and three years of mourning may have worked some change. Dear, kind Maria, do not try to deprive me of my last consolation; the idea that you might have consented to make me happy if----. Don't speak, for God's sake don't speak--you torture me. Yes, I know, I feel that you could have been mine, but--I am the most miserable of beings--I am already married!"

Maria looked at him in astonishment.

"I am married," continued Burmin; "I have been married more than three years, and do not know who my wife is, or where she is, or whether I shall ever see her again."

"What are you saying?" exclaimed Maria; "how strange! Pray continue."

"In the beginning of 1812," said Burmin, a I was hurrying on to Wilna, where my regiment was stationed. Arriving one evening late at a station, I ordered, the horses to be got ready quickly, when suddenly a fearful snowstorm broke out. Both station master and drivers advised me to wait till it was over. I listened to their advice, but an unaccountable restlessness took possession of me, just as though someone was pushing me on. Meanwhile, the snowstorm did not abate. I could bear it no longer, and again ordered the horses, and started in the midst of the storm. The driver took it into his head to drive along

the river, which would shorten the distance by three miles. The banks were covered with snowdrifts; the driver missed the turning which would have brought us out on to the road, and we turned up in an unknown place. The storm never ceased. I could discern a light, and told the driver to make for it. We entered a village, and found that the light proceeded from a wooden church. The church was open. Outside the railings stood several sledges, and people passing in and out through the porch.

"'Here! here!' cried several voices. I told the coachman to drive up.

"'Where have you dawdled?' said someone to me. 'The bride has fainted; the priest does not know what to do: we were on the point of going back. Make haste and get out!'

"I got out of the sledge in silence, and stepped into the church, which was dimly lighted with two or three tapers. A girl was sitting in a dark corner on a bench; and another girl was rubbing her temples. 'Thank God,' said the latter, 'you have come at last! You have nearly been the death of the young lady.'

"The old priest approached me; saying,

"'Shall I begin?'

"'Begin--begin, reverend father,' I replied, absently.

"The young lady was raised up. I thought her rather pretty. Oh, wild, unpardonable frivolity! I placed myself by her side at the altar. The priest hurried on.

"Three men and the maid supported the bride, and occupied themselves with her alone. We were married!

"'Kiss your wife,' said the priest.

"My wife turned her pale face towards me. I was going to kiss her, when she exclaimed, 'Oh! it is not he--not he!' and fell back insensible.

"The witnesses stared at me. I turned round and left the church without any attempt being made to stop me, threw myself into the sledge, and cried, 'Away!'"

"What!" exclaimed Maria. "And you don't know what became of your

unhappy wife?"

"I do not," replied Burmin; "neither do I know the name of the village where I was married, nor that of the station from which I started. At that time I thought so little of my wicked joke that, on driving away from the church, I fell asleep, and never woke till early the next morning, after reaching the third station. The servant who was with me died during the campaign, so that I have now no hope of ever discovering the unhappy woman on whom I played such a cruel trick, and who is now so cruelly avenged."

"Great heavens!" cried Maria, seizing his hand. "Then it was you, and you do not recognise me?" Burmin turned pale--and threw himself at her feet.

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WHAT MEN LIVE BY
Project Gutenberg's What Men Live By and Other Tales, by Leo Tolstoy

A shoemaker named Simon, who had neither house nor land of his own, lived with his wife and children in a peasant's hut, and earned his living by his work. Work was cheap, but bread was dear, and what he earned he spent for food. The man and his wife had but one sheepskin coat between them for winter wear, and even that was torn to tatters, and this was the second year he had been wanting to buy sheep-skins for a new coat. Before winter Simon saved up a little money: a three-rouble note lay hidden in his wife's box, and five roubles and twenty kopeks were owed him by customers in the village.

So one morning he prepared to go to the village to buy the sheep-skins. He put on over his shirt his wife's wadded nankeen jacket, and over that he put his own cloth coat. He took the three-rouble note in his pocket, cut himself a stick to serve as a staff, and started off after breakfast. "I'll collect the five roubles that are due to me," thought he, "add the three I have got, and that will be enough to buy sheep-skins for the winter coat."

He came to the village and called at a peasant's hut, but the man was not at home. The peasant's wife promised that the money should be paid next week, but she would not pay it herself. Then Simon called on another peasant, but this one swore he had no money, and would only pay

twenty kopeks which he owed for a pair of boots Simon had mended. Simon then tried to buy the sheep-skins on credit, but the dealer would not trust him.

"Bring your money," said he, "then you may have your pick of the skins. We know what debt-collecting is like." So all the business the shoemaker did was to get the twenty kopeks for boots he had mended, and to take a pair of felt boots a peasant gave him to sole with leather.

Simon felt downhearted. He spent the twenty kopeks on vodka, and started homewards without having bought any skins. In the morning he had felt the frost; but now, after drinking the vodka, he felt warm, even without a sheep-skin coat. He trudged along, striking his stick on the frozen earth with one hand, swinging the felt boots with the other, and talking to himself.

I

"I'm quite warm," said he, "though I have no sheep-skin coat. I've had a drop, and it runs through all my veins. I need no sheep-skins. I go along and don't worry about anything. That's the sort of man I am! What do I care? I can live without sheep-skins. I don't need them. My wife will fret, to be sure. And, true enough, it is a shame; one works all day long, and then does not get paid. Stop a bit! If you don't bring that money along, sure enough I'll skin you, blessed if I don't. How's that? He pays twenty kopeks at a time! What can I do with twenty kopeks? Drink it-that's all one can do! Hard up, he says he is! So he may be--but what about me? You have a house, and cattle, and everything; I've only what I stand up in! You have corn of your own growing; I have to buy every grain. Do what I will, I must spend three roubles every week for bread alone. I come home and find the bread all used up, and I have to fork out another rouble and a half. So just pay up what you owe, and no nonsense about it!"

By this time he had nearly reached the shrine at the bend of the road. Looking up, he saw something whitish behind the shrine. The daylight was fading, and the shoemaker peered at the thing without being able to make out what it was. "There was no white stone here before. Can it be an ox? It's not like an ox. It has a head like a man, but it's too white; and what could a man be doing there?"

He came closer, so that it was clearly visible. To his surprise it really was a man, alive or dead, sitting naked, leaning motionless against the shrine. Terror seized the shoemaker, and he thought, "Some one has killed him, stripped him, and left him there. If I meddle I shall surely get into trouble."

So the shoemaker went on. He passed in front of the shrine so that he could not see the man. When he had gone some way, he looked back, and saw that the man was no longer leaning against the shrine, but was moving as if looking towards him. The shoemaker felt more frightened than before, and thought, "Shall I go back to him, or shall I go on? If I go near him something dreadful may happen. Who knows who the fellow is? He has not come here for any good. If I go near him he may jump up and throttle me, and there will be no getting away. Or if not, he'd still be a burden on one's hands. What could I do with a naked man? I couldn't give him my last clothes. Heaven only help me to get away!"

So the shoemaker hurried on, leaving the shrine behind him-when suddenly his conscience smote him, and he stopped in the road.

"What are you doing, Simon?" said he to himself. "The man may be dying of want, and you slip past afraid. Have you grown so rich as to be afraid of robbers? Ah, Simon, shame on you!"

So he turned back and went up to the man.

II

Simon approached the stranger, looked at him, and saw that he was a young man, fit, with no bruises on his body, only evidently freezing and frightened, and he sat there leaning back without looking up at Simon, as if too faint to lift his eyes. Simon went close to him, and then the man seemed to wake up. Turning his head, he opened his eyes and looked into Simon's face. That one look was enough to make Simon fond of the man. He threw the felt boots on the ground, undid his sash, laid it on the boots, and took off his cloth coat.

"It's not a time for talking," said he. "Come, put this coat on at once!" And Simon took the man by the elbows and helped him to rise. As he stood there, Simon saw that his body was clean and in good condition, his hands and feet shapely, and his face good and kind. He threw

his coat over the man's shoulders, but the latter could not find the sleeves. Simon guided his arms into them, and drawing the coat well on, wrapped it closely about him, tying the sash round the man's waist.

Simon even took off his torn cap to put it on the man's head, but then his own head felt cold, and he thought: "I'm quite bald, while he has long curly hair." So he put his cap on his own head again. "It will be better to give him something for his feet," thought he; and he made the man sit down, and helped him to put on the felt boots, saying, "There, friend, now move about and warm yourself. Other matters can be settled later on. Can you walk?"

The man stood up and looked kindly at Simon, but could not say a word.

"Why don't you speak?" said Simon. "It's too cold to stay here, we must be getting home. There now, take my stick, and if you're feeling weak, lean on that. Now step out!"

The man started walking, and moved easily, not lagging behind.

As they went along, Simon asked him, "And where do you belong to?" "I'm not from these parts."

"I thought as much. I know the folks hereabouts. But, how did you come to be there by the shrine?"

"I cannot tell."

"Has some one been ill-treating you?"

"No one has ill-treated me. God has punished me."

"Of course God rules all. Still, you'll have to find food and shelter somewhere. Where do you want to go to?"

"It is all the same to me."

Simon was amazed. The man did not look like a rogue, and he spoke gently, but yet he gave no account of himself. Still Simon thought, "Who knows what may have happened?" And he said to the stranger: "Well then, come home with me, and at least warm yourself awhile."

So Simon walked towards his home, and the stranger kept up with him, walking at his side. The wind had risen and Simon felt it cold under his

shirt. He was getting over his tipsiness by now, and began to feel the frost. He went along sniffling and wrapping his wife's coat round him, and he thought to himself: "There now--talk about sheep-skins! I went out for sheep-skins and come home without even a coat to my back, and what is more, I'm bringing a naked man along with me. Matryona won't be pleased!" And when he thought of his wife he felt sad; but when he looked at the stranger and remembered how he had looked up at him at the shrine, his heart was glad.

III

Simon's wife had everything ready early that day. She had cut wood, brought water, fed the children, eaten her own meal, and now she sat thinking. She wondered when she ought to make bread: now or tomorrow? There was still a large piece left.

"If Simon has had some dinner in town," thought she, "and does not eat much for supper, the bread will last out another day."

She weighed the piece of bread in her hand again and again, and thought: "I won't make any more today. We have only enough flour left to bake one batch; We can manage to make this last out till Friday."

So Matryona put away the bread, and sat down at the table to patch her husband's shirt. While she worked she thought how her husband was buying skins for a winter coat.

"If only the dealer does not cheat him. My good man is much too simple; he cheats nobody, but any child can take him in. Eight roubles is a lot of money--he should get a good coat at that price. Not tanned skins, but still a proper winter coat. How difficult it was last winter to get on without a warm coat. I could neither get down to the river, nor go out anywhere. When he went out he put on all we had, and there was nothing left for me. He did not start very early today, but still it's time he was back. I only hope he has not gone on the spree!"

Hardly had Matryona thought this, when steps were heard on the threshold, and some one entered. Matryona stuck her needle into her work and went out into the passage. There she saw two men: Simon, and with him a man without a hat, and wearing felt boots.

Matryona noticed at once that her husband smelt of spirits. "There now, he has been drinking," thought she. And when she saw that he was coatless, had only her jacket on, brought no parcel, stood there silent, and seemed ashamed, her heart was ready to break with disappointment. "He has drunk the money," thought she, "and has been on the spree with some good-for-nothing fellow whom he has brought home with him."

Matryona let them pass into the hut, followed them in, and saw that the stranger was a young, slight man, wearing her husband's coat. There was no shirt to be seen under it, and he had no hat. Having entered, he stood, neither moving, nor raising his eyes, and Matryona thought: "He must be a bad man--he's afraid."

Matryona frowned, and stood beside the oven looking to see what they would do.

Simon took off his cap and sat down on the bench as if things were all right.

"Come, Matryona; if supper is ready, let us have some."

Matryona muttered something to herself and did not move, but stayed where she was, by the oven. She looked first at the one and then at the other of them, and only shook her head. Simon saw that his wife was annoyed, but tried to pass it off. Pretending not to notice anything, he took the stranger by the arm.

"Sit down, friend," said he, "and let us have some supper."

The stranger sat down on the bench.

"Haven't you cooked anything for us?" said Simon.

Matryona's anger boiled over. "I've cooked, but not for you. It seems to me you have drunk your wits away. You went to buy a sheep-skin coat, but come home without so much as the coat you had on, and bring a naked vagabond home with you. I have no supper for drunkards like you."

"That's enough, Matryona. Don't wag your tongue without reason. You had better ask what sort of man--"

"And you tell me what you've done with the money?"

Simon found the pocket of the jacket, drew out the three-rouble note,

and unfolded it.

"Here is the money. Trifonof did not pay, but promises to pay soon."

Matryona got still more angry; he had bought no sheep-skins, but had put his only coat on some naked fellow and had even brought him to their house.

She snatched up the note from the table, took it to put away in safety, and said: "I have no supper for you. We can't feed all the naked drunkards in the world."

"There now, Matryona, hold your tongue a bit. First hear what a man has to say-"

"Much wisdom I shall hear from a drunken fool. I was right in not wanting to marry you-a drunkard. The linen my mother gave me you drank; and now you've been to buy a coat-and have drunk it, too!"

Simon tried to explain to his wife that he had only spent twenty kopeks; tried to tell how he had found the man--but Matryona would not let him get a word in. She talked nineteen to the dozen, and dragged in things that had happened ten years before.

Matryona talked and talked, and at last she flew at Simon and seized him by the sleeve.

"Give me my jacket. It is the only one I have, and you must needs take it from me and wear it yourself. Give it here, you mangy dog, and may the devil take you."

Simon began to pull off the jacket, and turned a sleeve of it inside out; Matryona seized the jacket and it burst its seams, She snatched it up, threw it over her head and went to the door. She meant to go out, but stopped undecided--she wanted to work off her anger, but she also wanted to learn what sort of a man the stranger was.

IV

Matryona stopped and said: "If he were a good man he would not be naked. Why, he hasn't even a shirt on him. If he were all right, you would say

where you came across the fellow."

"That's just what I am trying to tell you," said Simon. "As I came to the shrine I saw him sitting all naked and frozen. It isn't quite the weather to sit about naked! God sent me to him, or he would have perished. What was I to do? How do we know what may have happened to him? So I took him, clothed him, and brought him along. Don't be so angry, Matryona. It is a sin. Remember, we all must die one day."

Angry words rose to Matryona's lips, but she looked at the stranger and was silent. He sat on the edge of the bench, motionless, his hands folded on his knees, his head drooping on his breast, his eyes closed, and his brows knit as if in pain. Matryona was silent: and Simon said: "Matryona, have you no love of God?"

Matryona heard these words, and as she looked at the stranger, suddenly her heart softened towards him. She came back from the door, and going to the oven she got out the supper. Setting a cup on the table, she poured out some kvas. Then she brought out the last piece of bread, and set out a knife and spoons.

"Eat, if you want to," said she.

Simon drew the stranger to the table.

"Take your place, young man," said he.

Simon cut the bread, crumbled it into the broth, and they began to eat. Matryona sat at the corner of the table resting her head on her hand and looking at the stranger.

And Matryona was touched with pity for the stranger, and began to feel fond of him. And at once the stranger's face lit up; his brows were no longer bent, he raised his eyes and smiled at Matryona.

When they had finished supper, the woman cleared away the things and began questioning the stranger. "Where are you from?" said she.

"I am not from these parts."

"But how did you come to be on the road?"

"I may not tell."

"Did some one rob you?"

"God punished me."

"And you were lying there naked?"

"Yes, naked and freezing. Simon saw me and had pity on me. He took off his coat, put it on me and brought me here. And you have fed me, given me drink, and shown pity on me. God will reward you!"

Matryona rose, took from the window Simon's old shirt she had been patching, and gave it to the stranger. She also brought out a pair of trousers for him.

"There," said she, "I see you have no shirt. Put this on, and lie down where you please, in the loft or on the oven."

The stranger took off the coat, put on the shirt, and lay down in the loft. Matryona put out the candle, took the coat, and climbed to where her husband lay.

Matryona drew the skirts of the coat over her and lay down, but could not sleep; she could not get the stranger out of her mind.

When she remembered that he had eaten their last piece of bread and that there was none for tomorrow, and thought of the shirt and trousers she had given away, she felt grieved; but when she remembered how he had smiled, her heart was glad.

Long did Matryona lie awake, and she noticed that Simon also was awake--he drew the coat towards him.

"Simon!"

"Well?"

"You have had the last of the bread, and I have not put any to rise. I don't know what we shall do tomorrow. Perhaps I can borrow some of neighbor Martha."

"If we're alive we shall find something to eat."

The woman lay still awhile, and then said, "He seems a good man, but why does he not tell us who he is?"

"I suppose he has his reasons."

"Simon!"

"Well?"

"We give; but why does nobody give us anything?"

Simon did not know what to say; so he only said, "Let us stop talking," and turned over and went to sleep.

V

In the morning Simon awoke. The children were still asleep; his wife had gone to the neighbor's to borrow some bread. The stranger alone was sitting on the bench, dressed in the old shirt and trousers, and looking upwards. His face was brighter than it had been the day before.

Simon said to him, "Well, friend; the belly wants bread, and the naked body clothes. One has to work for a living What work do you know?"

"I do not know any."

This surprised Simon, but he said, "Men who want to learn can learn anything."

"Men work, and I will work also."

"What is your name?"

"Michael."

"Well, Michael, if you don't wish to talk about yourself, that is your own affair; but you'll have to earn a living for yourself. If you will work as I tell you, I will give you food and shelter."

"May God reward you! I will learn. Show me what to do."

Simon took yarn, put it round his thumb and began to twist it.

"It is easy enough--see!"

Michael watched him, put some yarn round his own thumb in the same way, caught the knack, and twisted the yarn also.

Then Simon showed him how to wax the thread. This also Michael mastered. Next Simon showed him how to twist the bristle in, and how to sew, and this, too, Michael learned at once.

Whatever Simon showed him he understood at once, and after three days he worked as if he had sewn boots all his life. He worked without stopping, and ate little. When work was over he sat silently, looking upwards. He hardly went into the street, spoke only when necessary, and neither joked nor laughed. They never saw him smile, except that first evening when Matryona gave them supper.

VI

Day by day and week by week the year went round. Michael lived and worked with Simon. His fame spread till people said that no one sewed boots so neatly and strongly as Simon's workman, Michael; and from all the district round people came to Simon for their boots, and he began to be well off.

One winter day, as Simon and Michael sat working, a carriage on sledge-runners, with three horses and with bells, drove up to the hut. They looked out of the window; the carriage stopped at their door, a fine servant jumped down from the box and opened the door. A gentleman in a fur coat got out and walked up to Simon's hut. Up jumped Matryona and opened the door wide. The gentleman stooped to enter the hut, and when he drew himself up again his head nearly reached the ceiling, and he seemed quite to fill his end of the room.

Simon rose, bowed, and looked at the gentleman with astonishment. He had never seen any one like him. Simon himself was lean, Michael was thin, and Matryona was dry as a bone, but this man was like some one from another world: red-faced, burly, with a neck like a bull's, and looking altogether as if he were cast in iron.

The gentleman puffed, threw off his fur coat, sat down on the bench, and said, "Which of you is the master bootmaker?"

"I am, your Excellency," said Simon, coming forward.

Then the gentleman shouted to his lad, "Hey, Fedka, bring the leather!"

The servant ran in, bringing a parcel. The gentleman took the parcel and put it on the table.

"Untie it," said he. The lad untied it.

The gentleman pointed to the leather.

"Look here, shoemaker," said he, "do you see this leather?"

"Yes, your honor."

"But do you know what sort of leather it is?"

Simon felt the leather and said, "It is good leather."

"Good, indeed! Why, you fool, you never saw such leather before in your life. It's German, and cost twenty roubles."

Simon was frightened, and said, "Where should I ever see leather like that?"

"Just so! Now, can you make it into boots for me?"

"Yes, your Excellency, I can."

Then the gentleman shouted at him: "You can, can you? Well, remember whom you are to make them for, and what the leather is. You must make me boots that will wear for a year, neither losing shape nor coming unsown. If you can do it, take the leather and cut it up; but if you can't, say so. I warn you now if your boots become unsewn or lose shape within a year, I will have you put in prison. If they don't burst or lose shape for a year I will pay you ten roubles for your work."

Simon was frightened, and did not know what to say. He glanced at Michael and nudging him with his elbow, whispered: "Shall I take the work?"

Michael nodded his head as if to say, "Yes, take it."

Simon did as Michael advised, and undertook to make boots that would not lose shape or split for a whole year.

Calling his servant, the gentleman told him to pull the boot off his left leg, which he stretched out.

"Take my measure!" said he.

Simon stitched a paper measure seventeen inches long, smoothed it out, knelt down, wiped his hand well on his apron so as not to soil the gentleman's sock, and began to measure. He measured the sole, and round the instep, and began to measure the calf of the leg, but the paper was too short. The calf of the leg was as thick as a beam.

"Mind you don't make it too tight in the leg."

Simon stitched on another strip of paper. The gentleman twitched his toes about in his sock, looking round at those in the hut, and as he did so he noticed Michael.

"Whom have you there?" asked he.

"That is my workman. He will sew the boots."

"Mind," said the gentleman to Michael, "remember to make them so that they will last me a year."

Simon also looked at Michael, and saw that Michael was not looking at the gentleman, but was gazing into the corner behind the gentleman, as if he saw some one there. Michael looked and looked, and suddenly he smiled, and his face became brighter.

"What are you grinning at, you fool?" thundered the gentleman. "You had better look to it that the boots are ready in time."

"They shall be ready in good time," said Michael.

"Mind it is so," said the gentleman, and he put on his boots and his fur coat, wrapped the latter round him, and went to the door. But he forgot to stoop, and struck his head against the lintel.

He swore and rubbed his head. Then he took his seat in the carriage and drove away.

When he had gone, Simon said: "There's a figure of a man for you! You could not kill him with a mallet. He almost knocked out the lintel, but little harm it did him."

And Matryona said: "Living as he does, how should he not grow strong? Death itself can't touch such a rock as that."

VII

Then Simon said to Michael: "Well, we have taken the work, but we must see we don't get into trouble over it. The leather is dear, and the gentleman hot-tempered. We must make no mistakes. Come, your eye is truer and your hands have become nimbler than mine, so you take this measure and cut out the boots. I will finish off the sewing of the vamps."

Michael did as he was told. He took the leather, spread it out on the table, folded it in two, took a knife and began to cut out.

Matryona came and watched him cutting, and was surprised to see how he was doing it. Matryona was accustomed to seeing boots made, and she looked and saw that Michael was not cutting the leather for boots, but was cutting it round.

She wished to say something, but she thought to herself: "Perhaps I do not understand how gentleman's boots should be made. I suppose Michael knows more about it--and I won't interfere."

When Michael had cut up the leather, he took a thread and began to sew not with two ends, as boots are sewn, but with a single end, as for soft slippers.

Again Matryona wondered, but again she did not interfere. Michael sewed on steadily till noon. Then Simon rose for dinner, looked around, and saw that Michael had made slippers out of the gentleman's leather.

"Ah," groaned Simon, and he thought, "How is it that Michael, who has been with me a whole year and never made a mistake before, should do such a dreadful thing? The gentleman ordered high boots, welted, with whole fronts, and Michael has made soft slippers with single soles, and has wasted the leather. What am I to say to the gentleman? I can never

replace leather such as this."

And he said to Michael, "What are you doing, friend? You have ruined me! You know the gentleman ordered high boots, but see what you have made!"

Hardly had he begun to rebuke Michael, when "rat-tat" went the iron ring that hung at the door. Some one was knocking. They looked out of the window; a man had come on horseback, and was fastening his horse. They opened the door, and the servant who had been with the gentleman came in.

"Good day," said he.

"Good day," replied Simon. "What can we do for you?"

"My mistress has sent me about the boots."

"What about the boots?"

"Why, my master no longer needs them. He is dead."

"Is it possible?"

"He did not live to get home after leaving you, but died in the carriage. When we reached home and the servants came to help him alight, he rolled over like a sack. He was dead already, and so stiff that he could hardly be got out of the carriage. My mistress sent me here, saying: 'Tell the bootmaker that the gentleman who ordered boots of him and left the leather for them no longer needs the boots, but that he must quickly make soft slippers for the corpse. Wait till they are ready, and bring them back with you.' That is why I have come."

Michael gathered up the remnants of the leather; rolled them up, took the soft slippers he had made, slapped them together, wiped them down with his apron, and handed them and the roll of leather to the servant, who took them and said: "Good-bye, masters, and good day to you!"

VIII

Another year passed, and another, and Michael was now living his sixth year with Simon. He lived as before. He went nowhere, only spoke when

necessary, and had only smiled twice in all those years--once when Matryona gave him food, and a second time when the gentleman was in their hut. Simon was more than pleased with his workman. He never now asked him where he came from, and only feared lest Michael should go away.

They were all at home one day. Matryona was putting iron pots in the oven; the children were running along the benches and looking out of the window; Simon was sewing at one window, and Michael was fastening on a heel at the other.

One of the boys ran along the bench to Michael, leant on his shoulder, and looked out of the window.

"Look, Uncle Michael! There is a lady with little girls! She seems to be coming here. And one of the girls is lame."

When the boy said that, Michael dropped his work, turned to the window, and looked out into the street.

Simon was surprised. Michael never used to look out into the street, but now he pressed against the window, staring at something. Simon also looked out, and saw that a well-dressed woman was really coming to his hut, leading by the hand two little girls in fur coats and woolen shawls. The girls could hardly be told one from the other, except that one of them was crippled in her left leg and walked with a limp.

The woman stepped into the porch and entered the passage. Feeling about for the entrance she found the latch, which she lifted, and opened the door. She let the two girls go in first, and followed them into the hut.

"Good day, good folk!"

"Pray come in," said Simon. "What can we do for you?"

The woman sat down by the table. The two little girls pressed close to her knees, afraid of the people in the hut.

"I want leather shoes made for these two little girls for spring."

"We can do that. We never have made such small shoes, but we can make them; either welted or turnover shoes, linen lined. My man, Michael, is a master at the work."

Simon glanced at Michael and saw that he had left his work and was sitting with his eyes fixed on the little girls. Simon was surprised. It was true the girls were pretty, with black eyes, plump, and rosy-cheeked, and they wore nice kerchiefs and fur coats, but still Simon could not understand why Michael should look at them like that--just as if he had known them before. He was puzzled, but went on talking with the woman, and arranging the price. Having fixed it, he prepared the measure. The woman lifted the lame girl on to her lap and said: "Take two measures from this little girl. Make one shoe for the lame foot and three for the sound one. They both have the same size feet. They are twins."

Simon took the measure and, speaking of the lame girl, said: "How did it happen to her? She is such a pretty girl. Was she born so?"

"No, her mother crushed her leg."

Then Matryona joined in. She wondered who this woman was, and whose the children were, so she said: "Are not you their mother then?"

"No, my good woman; I am neither their mother nor any relation to them. They were quite strangers to me, but I adopted them."

"They are not your children and yet you are so fond of them?"

"How can I help being fond of them? I fed them both at my own breasts. I had a child of my own, but God took him. I was not so fond of him as I now am of them."

"Then whose children are they?"

IX

The woman, having begun talking, told them the whole story.

"It is about six years since their parents died, both in one week: their father was buried on the Tuesday, and their mother died on the Friday. These orphans were born three days after their father's death, and their mother did not live another day. My husband and I were then living as peasants in the village. We were neighbors of theirs, our yard being next to theirs. Their father was a lonely man; a wood-cutter in the

forest. When felling trees one day, they let one fall on him. It fell across his body and crushed his bowels out. They hardly got him home before his soul went to God; and that same week his wife gave birth to twins--these little girls. She was poor and alone; she had no one, young or old, with her. Alone she gave them birth, and alone she met her death."

"The next morning I went to see her, but when I entered the hut, she, poor thing, was already stark and cold. In dying she had rolled on to this child and crushed her leg. The village folk came to the hut, washed the body, laid her out, made a coffin, and buried her. They were good folk. The babies were left alone. What was to be done with them? I was the only woman there who had a baby at the time. I was nursing my first-born--eight weeks old. So I took them for a time. The peasants came together, and thought and thought what to do with them; and at last they said to me: 'For the present, Mary, you had better keep the girls, and later on we will arrange what to do for them.' So I nursed the sound one at my breast, but at first I did not feed this crippled one. I did not suppose she would live. But then I thought to myself, why should the poor innocent suffer? I pitied her, and began to feed her. And so I fed my own boy and these two--the three of them--at my own breast. I was young and strong, and had good food, and God gave me so much milk that at times it even overflowed. I used sometimes to feed two at a time, while the third was waiting. When one had enough I nursed the third. And God so ordered it that these grew up, while my own was buried before he was two years old. And I had no more children, though we prospered. Now my husband is working for the corn merchant at the mill. The pay is good, and we are well off. But I have no children of my own, and how lonely I should be without these little girls! How can I help loving them! They are the joy of my life!"

She pressed the lame little girl to her with one hand, while with the other she wiped the tears from her cheeks.

And Matryona sighed, and said: "The proverb is true that says, 'One may live without father or mother, but one cannot live without God.'"

So they talked together, when suddenly the whole hut was lighted up as though by summer lightning from the corner where Michael sat. They all looked towards him and saw him sitting, his hands folded on his knees, gazing upwards and smiling.

X

The woman went away with the girls. Michael rose from the bench, put down his work, and took off his apron. Then, bowing low to Simon and his wife, he said: "Farewell, masters. God has forgiven me. I ask your forgiveness, too, for anything done amiss."

And they saw that a light shone from Michael. And Simon rose, bowed down to Michael, and said: "I see, Michael, that you are no common man, and I can neither keep you nor question you. Only tell me this: how is it that when I found you and brought you home, you were gloomy, and when my wife gave you food you smiled at her and became brighter? Then when the gentleman came to order the boots, you smiled again and became brighter still? And now, when this woman brought the little girls, you smiled a third time, and have become as bright as day? Tell me, Michael, why does your face shine so, and why did you smile those three times?"

And Michael answered: "Light shines from me because I have been punished, but now God has pardoned me. And I smiled three times, because God sent me to learn three truths, and I have learnt them. One I learnt when your wife pitied me, and that is why I smiled the first time. The second I learnt when the rich man ordered the boots, and then I smiled again. And now, when I saw those little girls, I learn the third and last truth, and I smiled the third time."

And Simon said, "Tell me, Michael, what did God punish you for? and what were the three truths? that I, too, may know them."

And Michael answered: "God punished me for disobeying Him. I was an angel in heaven and disobeyed God. God sent me to fetch a woman's soul. I flew to earth, and saw a sick woman lying alone, who had just given birth to twin girls. They moved feebly at their mother's side, but she could not lift them to her breast. When she saw me, she understood that God had sent me for her soul, and she wept and said: 'Angel of God! My husband has just been buried, killed by a falling tree. I have neither sister, nor aunt, nor mother: no one to care for my orphans. Do not take my soul! Let me nurse my babes, feed them, and set them on their feet before I die. Children cannot live without father or mother.' And I hearkened to her. I placed one child at her breast and gave the other into her arms, and returned to the Lord in heaven. I flew to the Lord, and said: 'I could not take the soul of the mother. Her husband was killed by a tree; the woman has twins, and prays that her soul may not be taken. She says: "Let me nurse and feed my children, and set them on

their feet. Children cannot live without father or mother." I have not taken her soul.' And God said: 'Go-take the mother's soul, and learn three truths: Learn What dwells in man, What is not given to man, and What men live by. When thou has learnt these things, thou shalt return to heaven.' So I flew again to earth and took the mother's soul. The babes dropped from her breasts. Her body rolled over on the bed and crushed one babe, twisting its leg. I rose above the village, wishing to take her soul to God; but a wind seized me, and my wings drooped and dropped off. Her soul rose alone to God, while I fell to earth by the roadside."

XI

And Simon and Matryona understood who it was that had lived with them, and whom they had clothed and fed. And they wept with awe and with joy. And the angel said: "I was alone in the field, naked. I had never known human needs, cold and hunger, till I became a man. I was famished, frozen, and did not know what to do. I saw, near the field I was in, a shrine built for God, and I went to it hoping to find shelter. But the shrine was locked, and I could not enter. So I sat down behind the shrine to shelter myself at least from the wind. Evening drew on. I was hungry, frozen, and in pain. Suddenly I heard a man coming along the road. He carried a pair of boots, and was talking to himself. For the first time since I became a man I saw the mortal face of a man, and his face seemed terrible to me and I turned from it. And I heard the man talking to himself of how to cover his body from the cold in winter, and how to feed wife and children. And I thought: 'I am perishing of cold and hunger, and here is a man thinking only of how to clothe himself and his wife, and how to get bread for themselves. He cannot help me.' When the man saw me he frowned and became still more terrible, and passed me by on the other side. I despaired; but suddenly I heard him coming back. I looked up, and did not recognize the same man; before, I had seen death in his face; but now he was alive, and I recognized in him the presence of God. He came up to me, clothed me, took me with him, and brought me to his home. I entered the house; a woman came to meet us and began to speak. The woman was still more terrible than the man had been; the spirit of death came from her mouth; I could not breathe for the stench of death that spread around her. She wished to drive me out into the cold, and I knew that if she did so she would die. Suddenly her husband spoke to her of God, and the woman changed at once. And when she brought me food and looked at me, I glanced at her and saw that death no

longer dwelt in her; she had become alive, and in her, too, I saw God.

"Then I remembered the first lesson God had set me: 'Learn what dwells in man.' And I understood that in man dwells Love! I was glad that God had already begun to show me what He had promised, and I smiled for the first time. But I had not yet learnt all. I did not yet know What is not given to man, and What men live by.

"I lived with you, and a year passed. A man came to order boots that should wear for a year without losing shape or cracking. I looked at him, and suddenly, behind his shoulder, I saw my comrade--the angel of death. None but me saw that angel; but I knew him, and knew that before the sun set he would take that rich man's soul. And I thought to myself, 'The man is making preparations for a year, and does not know that he will die before evening.' And I remembered God's second saying, 'Learn what is not given to man.'

"What dwells in man I already knew. Now I learnt what is not given him. It is not given to man to know his own needs. And I smiled for the second time. I was glad to have seen my comrade angel--glad also that God had revealed to me the second saying.

"But I still did not know all. I did not know What men live by. And I lived on, waiting till God should reveal to me the last lesson. In the sixth year came the girl-twins with the woman; and I recognized the girls, and heard how they had been kept alive. Having heard the story, I thought, 'Their mother besought me for the children's sake, and I believed her when she said that children cannot live without father or mother; but a stranger has nursed them, and has brought them up.' And when the woman showed her love for the children that were not her own, and wept over them, I saw in her the living God and understood What men live by. And I knew that God had revealed to me the last lesson, and had forgiven my sin. And then I smiled for the third time."

XII

And the angel's body was bared, and he was clothed in light so that eye could not look on him; and his voice grew louder, as though it came not from him but from heaven above. And the angel said:

"I have learnt that all men live not by care for themselves but by love.

"It was not given to the mother to know what her children needed for their life. Nor was it given to the rich man to know what he himself needed. Nor is it given to any man to know whether, when evening comes, he will need boots for his body or slippers for his corpse.

"I remained alive when I was a man, not by care of myself, but because love was present in a passer-by, and because he and his wife pitied and loved me. The orphans remained alive not because of their mother's care, but because there was love in the heart of a woman, a stranger to them, who pitied and loved them. And all men live not by the thought they spend on their own welfare, but because love exists in man.

"I knew before that God gave life to men and desires that they should live; now I understood more than that.

"I understood that God does not wish men to live apart, and therefore he does not reveal to them what each one needs for himself; but he wishes them to live united, and therefore reveals to each of them what is necessary for all.

"I have now understood that though it seems to men that they live by care for themselves, in truth it is love alone by which they live. He who has love, is in God, and God is in him, for God is love."

And the angel sang praise to God, so that the hut trembled at his voice. The roof opened, and a column of fire rose from earth to heaven. Simon and his wife and children fell to the ground. Wings appeared upon the angel's shoulders, and he rose into the heavens.

And when Simon came to himself the hut stood as before, and there was no one in it but his own family.

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RASPBERRY SPRING
The Project Gutenberg EBook of A Sportsman's Sketches, by Ivan Turgenev

At the beginning of August the heat often becomes insupportable. At that season, from twelve to three o'clock, the most determined and ardent sportsman is not able to hunt, and the most devoted dog begins to 'clean his master's spurs,' that is, to follow at his heels, his eyes painfully blinking, and his tongue hanging out to an exaggerated

length; and in response to his master's reproaches he humbly wags his tail and shows his confusion in his face; but he does not run forward. I happened to be out hunting on exactly such a day. I had long been fighting against the temptation to lie down somewhere in the shade, at least for a moment; for a long time my indefatigable dog went on running about in the bushes, though he clearly did not himself expect much good from his feverish activity. The stifling heat compelled me at last to begin to think of husbanding our energies and strength. I managed to reach the little river Ista, which is already known to my indulgent readers, descended the steep bank, and walked along the damp, yellow sand in the direction of the spring, known to the whole neighbourhood as Raspberry Spring. This spring gushes out of a cleft in the bank, which widens out by degrees into a small but deep creek, and, twenty paces beyond it, falls with a merry babbling sound into the river; the short velvety grass is green about the source: the sun's rays scarcely ever reach its cold, silvery water. I came as far as the spring; a cup of birch-wood lay on the grass, left by a passing peasant for the public benefit. I quenched my thirst, lay down in the shade, and looked round. In the cave, which had been formed by the flowing of the stream into the river, and hence marked for ever with the trace of ripples, two old men were sitting with their backs to me. One, a rather stout and tall man in a neat dark-green coat and lined cap, was fishing; the other was thin and little; he wore a patched fustian coat and no cap; he held a little pot full of worms on his knees, and sometimes lifted his hand up to his grizzled little head, as though he wanted to protect it from the sun. I looked at him more attentively, and recognised in him Styopushka of Shumihino. I must ask the reader's leave to present this man to him.

A few miles from my place there is a large village called Shumihino, with a stone church, erected in the name of St. Kosmo and St. Damian. Facing this church there had once stood a large and stately manor-house, surrounded by various outhouses, offices, workshops, stables and coach-houses, baths and temporary kitchens, wings for visitors and for bailiffs, conservatories, swings for the people, and other more or less useful edifices. A family of rich landowners lived in this manor-house, and all went well with them, till suddenly one morning all this prosperity was burnt to ashes. The owners removed to another home; the place was deserted. The blackened site of the immense house was transformed into a kitchen-garden, cumbered up in parts by piles of bricks, the remains of the old foundations. A little hut had been hurriedly put together out of the beams that had escaped the fire; it was roofed with timber bought ten years before for the construction of a pavilion in the Gothic style; and the gardener, Mitrofan, with his

wife Axinya and their seven children, was installed in it. Mitrofan received orders to send greens and garden-stuff for the master's table, a hundred and fifty miles away; Axinya was put in charge of a Tyrolese cow, which had been bought for a high price in Moscow, but had not given a drop of milk since its acquisition; a crested smoke-coloured drake too had been left in her hands, the solitary 'seignorial' bird; for the children, in consideration of their tender age, no special duties had been provided, a fact, however, which had not hindered them from growing up utterly lazy. It happened to me on two occasions to stay the night at this gardener's, and when I passed by I used to get cucumbers from him, which, for some unknown reason, were even in summer peculiar for their size, their poor, watery flavour, and their thick yellow skin. It was there I first saw Styopushka. Except Mitrofan and his family, and the old deaf churchwarden Gerasim, kept out of charity in a little room at the one-eyed soldier's widow's, not one man among the house-serfs had remained at Shumihino; for Styopushka, whom I intend to introduce to the reader, could not be classified under the special order of house-serfs, and hardly under the genus 'man' at all.

Every man has some kind of position in society, and at least some ties of some sort; every house-serf receives, if not wages, at least some so-called 'ration.' Styopushka had absolutely no means of subsistence of any kind; had no relationship to anyone; no one knew of his existence. This man had not even a past; there was no story told of him; he had probably never been enrolled on a census-revision. There were vague rumours that he had once belonged to someone as a valet; but who he was, where he came from, who was his father, and how he had come to be one of the Shumihino people; in what way he had come by the fustian coat he had worn from immemorial times; where he lived and what he lived on--on all these questions no one had the least idea; and, to tell the truth, no one took any interest in the subject. Grandfather Trofimitch, who knew all the pedigrees of all the house-serfs in the direct line to the fourth generation, had once indeed been known to say that he remembered that Styopushka was related to a Turkish woman whom the late master, the brigadier Alexy Romanitch had been pleased to bring home from a campaign in the baggage waggon. Even on holidays, days of general money-giving and of feasting on buckwheat dumplings and vodka, after the old Russian fashion--even on such days Styopushka did not put in an appearance at the trestle-tables nor at the barrels; he did not make his bow nor kiss the master's hand, nor toss off to the master's health and under the master's eye a glass filled by the fat hands of the bailiff. Some kind soul who passed by him might share an unfinished bit of dumpling with the poor beggar, perhaps. At Easter they said 'Christ is risen!' to him; but he did not pull up his greasy

sleeve, and bring out of the depths of his pocket a coloured egg, to offer it, panting and blinking, to his young masters or to the mistress herself. He lived in summer in a little shed behind the chicken-house, and in winter in the ante-room of the bathhouse; in the bitter frosts he spent the night in the hayloft. The house-serfs had grown used to seeing him; sometimes they gave him a kick, but no one ever addressed a remark to him; as for him, he seems never to have opened his lips from the time of his birth. After the conflagration, this forsaken creature sought a refuge at the gardener Mitrofan's. The gardener left him alone; he did not say 'Live with me,' but he did not drive him away. And Styopushka did not live at the gardener's; his abode was the garden. He moved and walked about quite noiselessly; he sneezed and coughed behind his hand, not without apprehension; he was for ever busy and going stealthily to and fro like an ant; and all to get food--simply food to eat. And indeed, if he had not toiled from morning till night for his living, our poor friend would certainly have died of hunger. It's a sad lot not to know in the morning what you will find to eat before night! Sometimes Styopushka sits under the hedge and gnaws a radish or sucks a carrot, or shreds up some dirty cabbage-stalks; or he drags a bucket of water along, for some object or other, groaning as he goes; or he lights a fire under a small pot, and throws in some little black scraps which he takes from out of the bosom of his coat; or he is hammering in his little wooden den--driving in a nail, putting up a shelf for bread. And all this he does silently, as though on the sly: before you can look round, he's in hiding again. Sometimes he suddenly disappears for a couple of days; but of course no one notices his absence.... Then, lo and behold! he is there again, somewhere under the hedge, stealthily kindling a fire of sticks under a kettle. He had a small face, yellowish eyes, hair coming down to his eyebrows, a sharp nose, large transparent ears, like a bat's, and a beard that looked as if it were a fortnight's growth, and never grew more nor less. This, then, was Styopushka, whom I met on the bank of the Ista in company with another old man.

I went up to him, wished him good-day, and sat down beside him. Styopushka's companion too I recognised as an acquaintance; he was a freed serf of Count Piotr Ilitch's, one Mihal Savelitch, nicknamed Tuman (_i.e._ fog). He lived with a consumptive Bolhovsky man, who kept an inn, where I had several times stayed. Young officials and other persons of leisure travelling on the Orel highroad (merchants, buried in their striped rugs, have other things to do) may still see at no great distance from the large village of Troitska, and almost on the highroad, an immense two-storied wooden house, completely deserted, with its roof falling in and its windows closely stuffed up. At mid-day

in bright, sunny weather nothing can be imagined more melancholy than this ruin. Here there once lived Count Piotr Ilitch, a rich grandee of the olden time, renowned for his hospitality. At one time the whole province used to meet at his house, to dance and make merry to their heart's content to the deafening sound of a home-trained orchestra, and the popping of rockets and Roman candles; and doubtless more than one aged lady sighs as she drives by the deserted palace of the boyar and recalls the old days and her vanished youth. The count long continued to give balls, and to walk about with an affable smile among the crowd of fawning guests; but his property, unluckily, was not enough to last his whole life. When he was entirely ruined, he set off to Petersburg to try for a post for himself, and died in a room at a hotel, without having gained anything by his efforts. Tuman had been a steward of his, and had received his freedom already in the count's lifetime. He was a man of about seventy, with a regular and pleasant face. He was almost continually smiling, as only men of the time of Catherine ever do smile--a smile at once stately and indulgent; in speaking, he slowly opened and closed his lips, winked genially with his eyes, and spoke slightly through his nose. He blew his nose and took snuff too in a leisurely fashion, as though he were doing something serious.

'Well, Mihal Savelitch,' I began, 'have you caught any fish?'

'Here, if you will deign to look in the basket: I have caught two perch and five roaches.... Show them, Styopka.'

Styopushka stretched out the basket to me.

'How are you, Styopka?' I asked him.

'Oh--oh--not--not--not so badly, your honour,' answered Stepan, stammering as though he had a heavy weight on his tongue.

'And is Mitrofan well?'

'Well--yes, yes--your honour.'

The poor fellow turned away.

'But there are not many bites,' remarked Tuman; 'it's so fearfully hot; the fish are all tired out under the bushes; they're asleep. Put on a worm, Styopka.' (Styopushka took out a worm, laid it on his open hand, struck it two or three times, put it on the hook, spat on it, and gave it to Tuman.) 'Thanks, Styopka.... And you, your honour,' he continued,

turning to me, 'are pleased to be out hunting?'

'As you see.'

'Ah--and is your dog there English or German?'

The old man liked to show off on occasion, as though he would say, 'I, too, have lived in the world!'

'I don't know what breed it is, but it's a good dog.'

'Ah! and do you go out with the hounds too?'

'Yes, I have two leashes of hounds.'

Tuman smiled and shook his head.

'That's just it; one man is devoted to dogs, and another doesn't want them for anything. According to my simple notions, I fancy dogs should be kept rather for appearance' sake ... and all should be in style too; horses too should be in style, and huntsmen in style, as they ought to be, and all. The late count--God's grace be with him!--was never, I must own, much of a hunter; but he kept dogs, and twice a year he was pleased to go out with them. The huntsmen assembled in the courtyard, in red caftans trimmed with galloon, and blew their horns; his excellency would be pleased to come out, and his excellency's horse would be led up; his excellency would mount, and the chief huntsman puts his feet in the stirrups, takes his hat off, and puts the reins in his hat to offer them to his excellency. His excellency is pleased to click his whip like this, and the huntsmen give a shout, and off they go out of the gate away. A huntsman rides behind the count, and holds in a silken leash two of the master's favourite dogs, and looks after them well, you may fancy.... And he, too, this huntsman, sits up high, on a Cossack saddle: such a red-cheeked fellow he was, and rolled his eyes like this.... And there were guests too, you may be sure, on such occasions, and entertainment, and ceremonies observed.... Ah, he's got away, the Asiatic!' He interrupted himself suddenly, drawing in his line.

'They say the count used to live pretty freely in his day?' I asked.

The old man spat on the worm and lowered the line in again.

'He was a great gentleman, as is well-known. At times the persons of

the first rank, one may say, at Petersburg, used to visit him. With coloured ribbons on their breasts they used to sit down to table and eat. Well, he knew how to entertain them. He called me sometimes. "Tuman," says he, "I want by to-morrow some live sturgeon; see there are some, do you hear?" "Yes, your excellency." Embroidered coats, wigs, canes, perfumes, _eau de Cologne_ of the best sort, snuff-boxes, huge pictures: he would order them all from Paris itself! When he gave a banquet, God Almighty, Lord of my being! there were fireworks, and carriages driving up! They even fired off the cannon. The orchestra alone consisted of forty men. He kept a German as conductor of the band, but the German gave himself dreadful airs; he wanted to eat at the same table as the masters; so his excellency gave orders to get rid of him! "My musicians," says he, "can do their work even without a conductor." Of course he was master. Then they would fall to dancing, and dance till morning, especially at the écossaise-matrador. ... Ah--ah--there's one caught!' (The old man drew a small perch out of the water.) 'Here you are, Styopka! The master was all a master should be,' continued the old man, dropping his line in again, 'and he had a kind heart too. He would give you a blow at times, and before you could look round, he'd forgotten it already. There was only one thing: he kept mistresses. Ugh, those mistresses! God forgive them! They were the ruin of him too; and yet, you know, he took them most generally from a low station. You would fancy they would not want much? Not a bit--they must have everything of the most expensive in all Europe! One may say, "Why shouldn't he live as he likes; it's the master's business" ... but there was no need to ruin himself. There was one especially; Akulina was her name. She is dead now; God rest her soul! the daughter of the watchman at Sitoia; and such a vixen! She would slap the count's face sometimes. She simply bewitched him. My nephew she sent for a soldier; he spilt some chocolate on a new dress of hers ... and he wasn't the only one she served so. Ah, well, those were good times, though!' added the old man with a deep sigh. His head drooped forward and he was silent.

'Your master, I see, was severe, then?' I began after a brief silence.

'That was the fashion then, your honour,' he replied, shaking his head.

'That sort of thing is not done now?' I observed, not taking my eyes off him.

He gave me a look askance.

'Now, surely it's better,' he muttered, and let out his line further.

We were sitting in the shade; but even in the shade it was stifling. The sultry atmosphere was faint and heavy; one lifted one's burning face uneasily, seeking a breath of wind; but there was no wind. The sun beat down from blue and darkening skies; right opposite us, on the other bank, was a yellow field of oats, overgrown here and there with wormwood; not one ear of the oats quivered. A little lower down a peasant's horse stood in the river up to its knees, and slowly shook its wet tail; from time to time, under an overhanging bush, a large fish shot up, bringing bubbles to the surface, and gently sank down to the bottom, leaving a slight ripple behind it. The grasshoppers chirped in the scorched grass; the quail's cry sounded languid and reluctant; hawks sailed smoothly over the meadows, often resting in the same spot, rapidly fluttering their wings and opening their tails into a fan. We sat motionless, overpowered with the heat. Suddenly there was a sound behind us in the creek; someone came down to the spring. I looked round, and saw a peasant of about fifty, covered with dust, in a smock, and wearing bast slippers; he carried a wickerwork pannier and a cloak on his shoulders. He went down to the spring, drank thirstily, and got up.

'Ah, Vlass!' cried Tuman, staring at him; 'good health to you, friend! Where has God sent you from?'

'Good health to you, Mihal Savelitch!' said the peasant, coming nearer to us; 'from a long way off.'

'Where have you been?' Tuman asked him.

'I have been to Moscow, to my master.'

'What for?'

'I went to ask him a favour.'

'What about?'

'Oh, to lessen my rent, or to let me work it out in labour, or to put me on another piece of land, or something.... My son is dead--so I can't manage it now alone.'

'Your son is dead?'

'He is dead. My son,' added the peasant, after a pause, 'lived in

Moscow as a cabman; he paid, I must confess, rent for me.'

'Then are you now paying rent?'

'Yes, we pay rent.'

'What did your master say?'

'What did the master say! He drove me away! Says he, "How dare you come straight to me; there is a bailiff for such things. You ought first," says he, "to apply to the bailiff ... and where am I to put you on other land? You first," says he, "bring the debt you owe." He was angry altogether.'

'What then--did you come back?'

'I came back. I wanted to find out if my son had not left any goods of his own, but I couldn't get a straight answer. I say to his employer, "I am Philip's father"; and he says, "What do I know about that? And your son," says he, "left nothing; he was even in debt to me." So I came away.'

The peasant related all this with a smile, as though he were speaking of someone else; but tears were starting into his small, screwed-up eyes, and his lips were quivering.

'Well, are you going home then now?'

'Where can I go? Of course I'm going home. My wife, I suppose, is pretty well starved by now.'

'You should--then,' Styopushka said suddenly. He grew confused, was silent, and began to rummage in the worm-pot.

'And shall you go to the bailiff?' continued Tuman, looking with some amazement at Styopka.

'What should I go to him for?--I'm in arrears as it is. My son was ill for a year before his death; he could not pay even his own rent. But it can't hurt me; they can get nothing from me.... Yes, my friend, you can be as cunning as you please--I'm cleaned out!' (The peasant began to laugh.) 'Kintlyan Semenitch'll have to be clever if--'

Vlass laughed again.

'Oh! things are in a sad way, brother Vlass,' Tuman ejaculated deliberately.

'Sad! No!' (Vlass's voice broke.) 'How hot it is!' he went on, wiping his face with his sleeve.

'Who is your master?' I asked him.

'Count Valerian Petrovitch.'

'The son of Piotr Ilitch?'

'The son of Piotr Ilitch,' replied Tuman. 'Piotr Hitch gave him Vlass's village in his lifetime.'

'Is he well?'

'He is well, thank God!' replied Vlass. 'He has grown so red, and his face looks as though it were padded.'

'You see, your honour,' continued Tuman, turning to me, 'it would be very well near Moscow, but it's a different matter to pay rent here.'

'And what is the rent for you altogether?'

'Ninety-five roubles,' muttered Vlass.

'There, you see; and it's the least bit of land; all there is is the master's forest.'

'And that, they say, they have sold,' observed the peasant.

'There, you see. Styopka, give me a worm. Why, Styopka, are you asleep--eh?'

Styopushka started. The peasant sat down by us. We sank into silence again. On the other bank someone was singing a song--but such a mournful one. Our poor Vlass grew deeply dejected.

Half-an-hour later we parted.

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